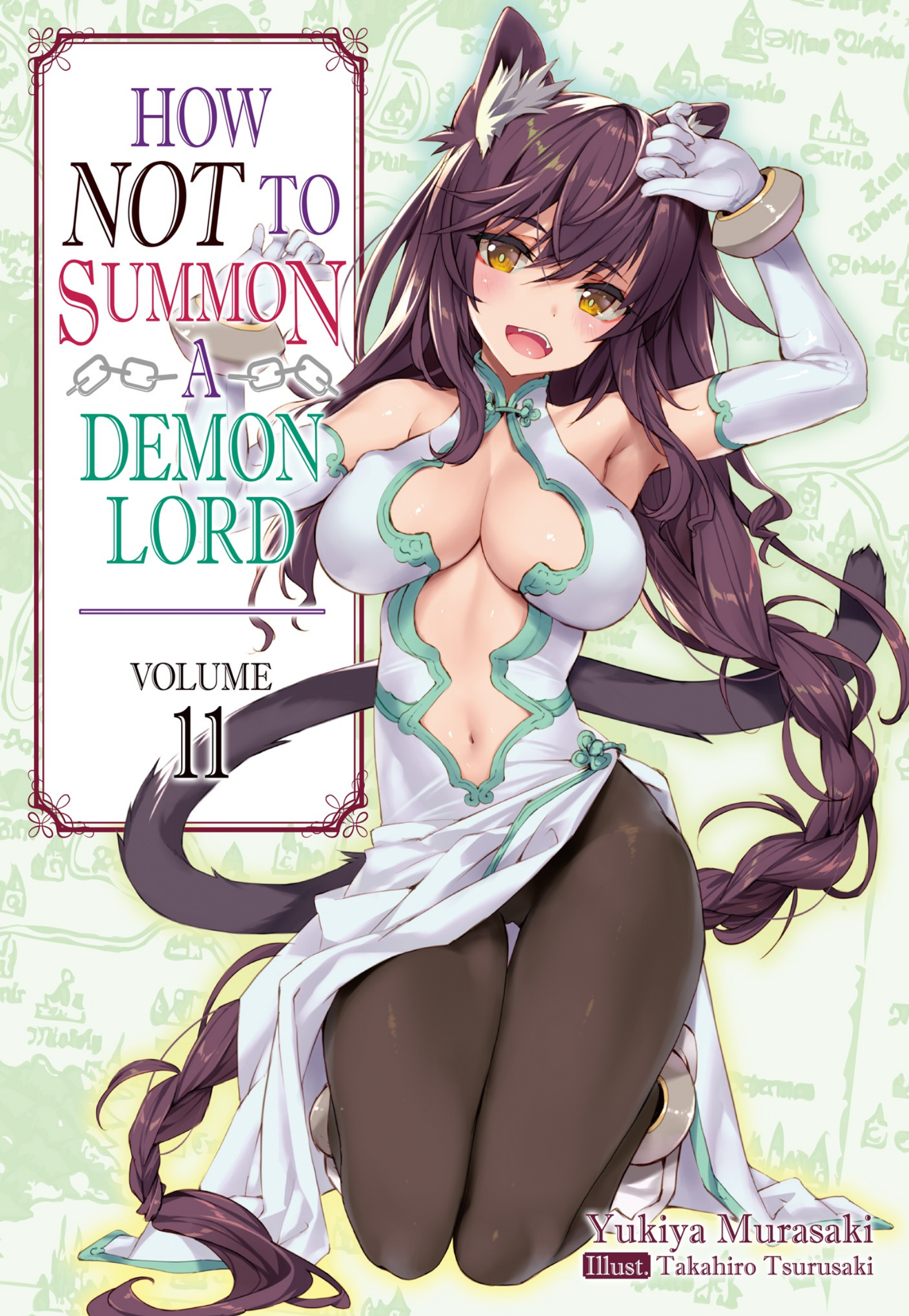


HOW NOT TO SUMMON A DEMON LORD

VOLUME

11

Yūkiya Murasaki
Illust. Takahiro Tsurusaki



VISIT...

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Fennely opened her legs, and Diablo nearly fell over the ledge as he leaned in to look.





while Shera's was a light blue one that accentuated her large chest.

Rem's dress was the color of red wine and adorned with cute frills,

It was Rem and Shera!

But they weren't in their usual attire, they were clad in dresses that made them look like young ladies of nobility.



“It’s fine. No one’s
expecting you to
withstand this when
you’re not used to it.
If anything, I’m happy.
Go ahead, as you like.”



CHARACTERS



A top player of a game very similar to this world. He is in fact socially inept, and can't communicate without acting the part of his in-game character.

AKA: "The Demon Lord from Another World"



A Pantherian summoner. The Demon Lord Krebskulm was sealed in her body, but she finally removed her after much hardship. Serious to a fault.



Princess of the Elves. Choosing Diablo as the king of her country, she finally became queen. Claims to be a summoner, but is a much more skilled archer. Speaks in a light, easygoing fashion.



Lumachina Weselia

The High Priest who stands as the highest authority of the church. Diablo saved her from the Cardinal Authority's devious plots, and has worshiped him as an avatar of God ever since.



Klem

The Demon Lord Krebskulm who was sealed within Rem's body. Surprisingly took the form of a young, biscuit-loving girl upon revival. Lives in Faltra, pretending to be a member of the races.



Sylvie

Guildmaster of Faltra's Adventurer's Guild. Being a Grasswalker may give her the appearance of a child, but she's an experienced veteran.

A thief who had her level increased to 80 by a Subjugation Contract, but decided to study at the mage academy out of admiration for Diablo. Possesses a Holy Grail housing a level-up goddess.



Alicia Cristera

A duke's daughter and an Imperial Knight who despises the races, despite her standing. Her objective was overthrowing the Kingdom of Lyferia, but she swore to obey Diablo to atone for her crimes.



Horn

The Story So Far

The Story So Far

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Design / AFTERGLOW

Editor / Satoshi Shoji

The story so far—

In the MMORPG *Cross Reverie*, Takuma Sakamoto was overwhelmingly powerful, and was able to role play so well that his performances were more boss-like than the actual bosses of the game. For this reason, he came to be known as the “Demon Lord.”

By defeating the Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros, faster than anyone else, he obtained the super rare item, the 《Demon Lord’s Ring》. It was one of the ultimate pieces of equipment in the game, able to reflect all types of magic.

Then, one day, Takuma found himself summoned to a world that looked exactly like *Cross Reverie*! Having performed the ritual magic at the same time, the Pantherian, Rem, and the Elf, Shera, fought over which one of them was his summoner.

But thanks to the Demon Lord’s Ring he wore, the magic was reflected, so the 《Enslavement Collar》 meant for him had clamped onto the two girls instead!

Faced with Rem and Shera arguing, Takuma was at a loss of what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn’t talk with other people if his life depended on it. After struggling over what to say, the words that came out of his mouth were from the Demon Lord role play he had used in the game:

“Cease your pointless squabbling. You are in the presence of Diablo.”

Diablo soon after found himself foiling an invasion of one hundred Fallen, led by a Fallen named Edelgard, as well as an attack from within Faltra itself at the hands of the Fallen, Gregore. Diablo then later found himself the recipient of a quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. Prince Keera of the Elven kingdom of Greenwood had demanded Shera be returned to him, threatening open war with Faltra should compliance fail. The details of Galford’s quest were simply to find a way to avoid the war. The bespectacled, straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight Alicia was assigned to the group as an observer to watch over their actions.

Using the 《Marionette's Flute》, Keera manipulated Shera and unleashed a forbidden summon called the Force Hydra—yet Diablo still managed to rescue her.

After her rescue, the group set off to resurrect the Demon Lord Krebskulm, trapped inside Rem. But in the process, Krebskulm had lost a portion of her memories as a Demon Lord, being reduced to a biscuit-loving young girl, who was then nicknamed “Klem.”

Peaceful days passed by...

Suddenly, Alicia betrayed the group! Now awakened as a true Demon Lord, Klem went into a destructive frenzy. But thanks to one of Diablo's ultimate spells and the sound of Rem's and Shera's voices, Klem was subdued and reverted to her biscuit-loving form. To ensure Klem would never go berserk again, Diablo bound her with the same enslavement magic afflicted upon Shera and Rem.

Through a string of coincidences, or perhaps God's own guidance, Diablo found himself rescuing Lumachina, a holy woman, from the Paladin Gewalt. Being a High Priest, Lumachina was the highest ranking member of the church. However, due to her attempts at ridding the church of corruption and avarice, she was nearly assassinated. Still seeking to reform the corrupt church, Lumachina sought the help of the Paladin Captain Batutta, setting out to meet him in Zircon Tower.

Located in the perilous expanse of the former Demon Lord's Domain, Diablo's group of adventurers accompanied her as bodyguards. After a long journey, they arrived at their destination and were greeted by Batutta.

While there, Diablo claimed back his own dungeon, gained many pieces of helpful equipment and items, and fought off the new Demon Lord's army, gaining new allies in the process: the Grasswalker, Horn, and the magimatic maid, Rose.

Shortly after, Horn decided to change classes and study to become a sorcerer, leaving for the magic academy.

But they could not celebrate their victories, however. Having been informed that the Elven king, Shera's father, had passed away, the four traveled to her

homeland where Shera was already engaged to a pig-faced Elf called Drango (for the sake of the country, of course). Diablo attempted to prevent the wedding, giving her a wedding ring and assuming the throne as the new king of Greenwood.

Afterward, to prepare for his upcoming battle with the Demon Overlord Modinaram, Diablo set out to meet the legendary swordmaster and level up as a warrior, only to find (to his great surprise) that the current swordmaster and heir to the previous was none other than a Dwarven girl called Sasara.

The previous swordmaster, revealed to be Sasara's stepfather, Graham, sought to master the blade with such zeal that he transformed his body into that of an oni. But, despite his efforts, Sasara struck down Graham, proving once and for all her overwhelming prowess.

At the same time, the Demon Overlord Modinaram was marching its armies upon Faltra. The governor, Galford, and other adventurers, including Emile, were severely injured in combat. Diablo rushed to the scene and, with Rose and Sasara serving as vanguards, defeated the Demon Overlord. But Rem was then captured, and upon rescuing her, Diablo gave her a wedding ring.

News of the Demon Overlord's defeat reached Lyferia's king, Delouche Xandros, who ordered that Diablo be summoned to his castle.

"Laughable! If he wishes an audience, let the king come to *me*!"

Being too inept when it came to meeting important people, Diablo hid behind his Demon Lord-ly bravado to run away. Left with no choice, his wives Rem and Shera headed to the capital, Seven Wall, in his stead.

Diablo then learned from Rose that the rings he had given Rem and Shera were actually a pair, which meant he had unintentionally caused Rem and Shera to get married! Resolving to fix the situation before it came to light, he partnered up with the guildmaster Sylvie to visit the Viridian Cathedral.

Diablo reached the capital, and, after some misadventures, visited the sorcerer's academy in order to resolve a mystery quest. He saved Horn from trouble and defeated the powerful monster that was summoned. But, just as he considered going back to Faltra, the captain of the Palace Knights, Maximum Abrams, forcibly demanded to escort Diablo to the castle. Leaving Sylvie and

the others behind, Diablo boarded the black carriage.

“Hmph... Going to such lengths to call for me, I expect quite the banquet.”

Prologue

The howling of animals reverberated through the air. Another sound intersected it, followed by even more howling. Hearing those sounds, the soldiers stationed on the walls cried out, “An attack! A raid! The spriggan’s coming!”

Something moved under the moonlight—a huge form that quaked the ground. Its hulking, stout shape protruded from out of the earth, its massive arms ending in fists that resembled mallets. There were only holes where its eyes and mouth should have been, and there was no way of telling where it was looking.

—A spriggan.

It was said to be a type of fairy that guarded the land. And, as if to push it forward, the animals’ howling increased in volume, becoming a deafening cacophony.

The soldiers on top of the walls nocked their arrows.

“Fire!”

A volley of flaming arrows was unleashed. Cloths submerged in oil were tied to the arrowheads, made to set fire to their target. It was an effective weapon on the beasts, but the spriggan’s skin deflected them with the sound of dry metal.

The sorcerers called forth their summons. Large Salamanders spat out breaths of flame, and Sylphs flying in the heavens kicked up whirlwinds. But none of them penetrated the spriggan’s thick skin, and they failed in stopping its advance.

The soldiers stirred, and, after taking a frightened step or two back, started running away from the walls.

“Keep attacking!” the commander called out loudly. “Don’t turn your back to them! And you call yourselves soldiers of the kingdom?! Don’t abandon the

pride of Lyfer—”

The gigantic spriggan swung up its hand and slammed it down on the walls, crushing them with its hammer-like fists.

Countless screams, and enough howls to drown even those out, filled the night. From within the darkness, the beasts rushed out. Their heads were like those of foxes. They looked like animals, but brandished swords and spears skillfully. Some were even covered in armor. But they didn’t speak in the tongue of the races.

The Therianthropes known as Kobolds—wild beasts that were close to, but not quite part of, the races of man.

Overwhelmed by the Therianthropes, the Lyferian soldiers could only run around in a panic, having lost both their commander and the walls.

On day 29 of the eleventh month of year 164 of the Lyferian calendar, one of the fortresses making up the southern region of Caliture fell in a single night.

The following day, the royal astrologer Vinashin gave the king counsel from his sickbed: catastrophe would befall the country should they step upon the kingdom’s fiefdom.

Chapter 1: Visiting the Royal Castle

Year 165 of the Lyferian calendar, tenth day of the first month— Rem and Shera were in their room in the guest ward of Castle Grandiose. Before them was a table loaded with countless dishes that served as their breakfast.

“The food here is so tasty!” Shera gladly relished the luxury of being able to eat as much of this delicious cooking as she asked for.

“...At least get dressed before you get out of bed.”

Shera was still in her pajamas, which consisted of just a blouse and panties.

“But it’s not like we’re gonna meet the king today, right?”

“...The audience will likely start whenever His Majesty decides it suits him, but we likely won’t be called right this instant.”

They weren’t told in any great detail, but the old butler said there were still a few days’ worth of meetings in line ahead of theirs. The king’s physical condition had deteriorated with the turn of the year, and, coupled with matters of government and military that had popped up, his scheduled meetings were going on slowly.

“I hope they’ll call us when they’re ready,” Shera said, her cheeks stuffed with fruit.

“...Yes, I asked if it’s possible for us to try again some other time.”

“And they said no?”

“...The butler said, ‘as your arrival has been reported to the king already, leaving without holding an audience may gall the king and be regarded as an affront.’”

“What language was that?”

“...Lyferia’s common language. What it means is that the king knows we’re in the castle, and if we leave without seeing him, he might get angry.”

“Then why not say it simply like that?”

“...There’s a way of speaking that fits the time and place.”

“Well, we came all the way here, so we should meet him. I don’t want to have to come here a second time.”

Indeed, there was a five-day carriage ride between the frontier city of Faltra and the capital, Seven Wall, which could be made a longer trip depending on the weather. It wasn’t exactly a place one could visit easily.

“...I won’t deny it’s a hard trip, but... You just want to stay in the castle so you can eat their food, don’t you?”

“Huh? Heh, heehee... That’s not true~ But why don’t you eat too, Rem?”

“...I dislike eating more than the proper amount. It makes me sluggish.”

“I eat the proper amount too!”

“...Shera, haven’t you gained a little weight?”

“Huh? I never gain weight.”

Rem eyed her with scorn.

“...If we don’t hold that audience soon, you’ll end up becoming round like a barrel.”

“I’m telling you, I don’t gain weight!”

It was then that there was a polite knock on the ivory door to their room.

“My apologies for interrupting your meal.”

It was the voice of the busybody old butler. Rem opened the door.

“...Did something happen?”

“I apologize for interrupting you during your free time, Miss Shera L. Greenwood and Miss Rem Galleu. There is someone who wishes to see you.”

“...And who might that be?”

“Duke Noah Gibun.”

Rem and Shera exchanged glances and shook their heads. It seemed neither of them knew him.

“...I don’t believe we know him?”

“Duke Gibun is blessed with great intelligence despite his age, and is His Majesty’s most trusted minister, given the most responsibilities. Not only was he granted the title of Duke, rumors say he will eventually reach the post of prime minister. I believe he has some things to ask you before your audience, most respectfully.”

“...I see.”

They were being evaluated to see if they were worthy of an audience with the king?

“There are many among the regional nobles and wealthy merchants who make great strides for a meeting with Duke Gibun,” the butler continued. “You are quite fortunate and should feel honored for being allowed to meet him.”

“...I wonder what such an influential person wants with us? We’ll get ready at once, so could you give us a bit of time?”

“Of course,” the butler said, relieved. “I will prepare the lounge, then, and will come to take you there in thirty minutes.”

It seemed that he only brought up the duke’s popularity and mentioned how much of an honor it was to see him because he feared they might refuse to meet him. It seemed he didn’t want to have to be the bearer of bad news who lets the future prime minister know his request for a meeting was turned down. They would have to meet him out of consideration for this hardworking butler, too.

The old butler left, closing the door behind him. Rem locked the door.

“...Get dressed, Shera.”

“Okay!”

She briskly took off her pajamas and threw them aside, but, just as she tried to put on her usual green outfit... it happened.

“Gh?!”

“...What’s wrong?”

“I feel... tight... in my chest... Can’t breathe...”

“Are you sick?!”

Or maybe the food was poisoned?!

But then Shera said, while slackening the leather straps holding her outfit from behind...

“I think my boobs got bigger.”

Rem’s gaze chilled and froze over.

“...Fat Elf.”

“Wow, mean?!”

“Get ready. Actually, no. Stay behind and keep guzzling down their food. I’ll meet the Duke alone—as Diablo’s wife.”

“Aaaah, but I’m his wife, too!”

“Then get dressed. Any shameful thing you do drags Diablo’s name through the mud.”

“Ngngng... I can adjust these clothes with the leather straps, but... I think they’re at their limit.”

The Elves were a slender race, and its women had modest chests, but Shera was an exception with rather large bosoms. Because of this, it seemed she had trouble getting into the royal Elven outfit. The leather straps were creaking under the pressure.

“Uuugh, my boobs are so big, I can’t move!”



“...Kuh.”

Looking down at her body, which lacked any parts that would make getting dressed hard, Rem grit her teeth.

No, I'm more nimble this way!

†

The room that made up Castle Grandiose's tea lounge looked like a museum exhibit of sorts, and set up at its center was a round table for four. It seemed to be carved out of blue crystal, but there were no seams in it. One couldn't imagine the size of the crystal required to carve this table. The backrests of the chairs seemed to be made up of dragon egg shells cut in half, and they were furnished with great bear furs.

The walls of the circular room were painted over, giving it the appearance of a garden. Along with this delicately designed mural, the room was also filled with the babbling of a stream, the scent of blooming flowers, and the fluttering of birds' wings.

Rem was shocked beyond all words.

“This tea is so tasty!” Shera was enjoying the tea they were served without a hint of timidity.

The white teacup held between her fingers was probably made of porcelain brought over from the countries to the far east, with just one set costing more than either of their yearly incomes. Rem suddenly became acutely aware that Shera was royalty, raised in the blessed forests of Greenwood, a veritable heaven on Earth.

The two of them waited alone for a while, until one of the trees drawn over the walls opened. It seemed there was a door there. A single man entered the room, without even one bodyguard accompanying him. The luxurious shawl he was wearing marked him as a duke of the kingdom of Lyferia.

Duke Noah Gibun.

He was a handsome man with golden hair and blue eyes, and surprisingly, the expression he wore wasn't a cold one. In fact, his smile seemed quite mild and

gentle. He looked more like a short-haired girl.



“Ah...”

Looking at him oddly reminded Rem of Diablo. They were entirely unlike each other, but perhaps it was how perfectly formed their facial features were. That was likely their strongest common point.

Rem rose from her seat and gave a ladylike bow. Right now, she wasn't the adventurer Rem Galleu, but had the representative position of the wife and queen of the king of Greenwood, Diablo.

“Mm?” Shera tilted her head, still seated.

Without focusing on either one of the contrastive two, Noah bowed respectfully.

“I am called Noah Gibun. Honored to make your acquaintance.”

“I'm Shera L. Greenwood.”

“I terribly apologize for calling you over without any notice today. Please forgive my impoliteness.”

“It's fine~”

Rem was struck with timidity at this all-too-natural exchange. If anything, she almost had to anxiously wonder if her standing on ceremony like this was out of place.

“...I'm Rem Galleu.” She finally stammered out her name.

Noah seemed surprised. Looking back, perhaps she should have said her title. Diablo was the king of Greenwood, so his full name would be Diablo Greenwood.

So, as his wife, her name would be...

Rem Greenwood?

Rem felt her cheeks flush over.

“What's wrong?” Shera looked at her curiously.

“...I-I-it's... nothing...”

Rem shook her head, banishing the odd delusion filling her mind.

Incidentally, the “L.” in Shera’s full name of Shera L. Greenwood marked her as part of the Greenwood royal bloodline. Diablo and Rem married into the royal family and weren’t descended from the royal line, so they weren’t granted it onto their names. Greenwood’s royal bloodline had an important meaning to it, so the clear distinction had to be made.

“What business do you have with us?” Rem asked.

“Regardless of His Majesty’s intentions, it is a rule that I talk things over with any of his guests first.” Noah smiled amicably. “It’s a formal matter, so please pardon me.”

“...I see.”

Noah’s gaze fixed on their necks.

“From what the rumors say, those are Enslavement Collars. Is that true?”

Rem’s hand inadvertently jumped to cover her collar. Hearing it pointed out again made her embarrassed all over again.

“Yeah, that’s right.” Shera, who never did care about the little things, nodded.

“In that case, is the rumor Sir Diablo’s 《Magic Reflection》 put it on you two true as well?” Noah appended another question.

Rem rose to her feet, the sound of her heartbeat loud in her ears.

“...Duke Gibun... Just who are you...?!”

His peaceful smile didn’t waver in the slightest.

“My every action is to ensure that the kingdom of Lyferia is peaceful and prosperous. And I am not lenient enough to forsake gathering information on an important person capable of matching a Demon Lord in strength.”

“Since when did...”

“Could you kindly answer my question first?”

Rem was a bit conflicted, but concluded that trying to keep things secret would be a pointless endeavor.

“...The rumors are true. We intended to enslave Diablo as we would a summon beast, but the Enslavement Ritual was reflected, and the collars

clasped around us instead.”

She heard Noah whisper “fascinating.” He then answered the question.

“Since when have I put my eye on Sir Diablo, you ask? That would be when he repelled the Demon Lord’s army from Zircon Tower.”

“...I see.”

Many soldiers witnessed that fight, and the events of the war—regardless of its results—were reported in detail to the capital. Diablo had defeated countless Fallen with his powerful magic, and even defeated the Fallen’s general, who was considered immortal. It was natural he would draw their interest.

Rem brought a hand to her mouth. Soon after that battle, Diablo went to the capital to oppose the church’s Cardinal Authority.

“Is something bothering you?” Noah smiled thinly.

“...When Diablo came to the capital... When we fought to take the church back from the Cardinal Authority.”

“I’ve received a report regarding that, yes. Even His Majesty cannot interfere with the church’s business, so we’re quite grateful to you for saving the High Priest and for your assistance with normalizing the church.”

Rem recalled, *“Back then, it was the Order of Palace Knights that assassinated the Cardinal Authority. If they were watching Diablo the whole time, it made sense they’d find this perfect opportunity to get rid of them... Which could mean... it was Noah that ordered their assassination?”*

He remained smiling, awaiting Rem’s words. This was the royal castle. Saying just one wrong thing would turn this room into the equivalent of sitting in the pit of a monster’s stomach. Saying anything unnecessary would be dangerous...

A silence hung heavily over the room...

“Wow, this cake is great!” Only to be disturbed by Shera’s exclaiming. “Could I have another?”

The snapping of the strained tension that hung in the air was almost audible. Rem wondered what she was about to say...

“I’m glad you like it.” Noah smiled. “That apple tart is a reproduction of a flavor from my birthplace. I’ll have as many as you like prepared for you.”

“Yay! I’ll take some back for Diablo!”

Rem sighed, noting it would likely go bad during their five-day trip back to Faltra.

“...Whatever the case, we only came here because we were called. As both an adventurer and king of Greenwood, Diablo has no intent of opposing Lyferia. I think his putting his life on the line against the Demon Overlord proves that.”

“Yes, of course. We’re not suspecting Sir Diablo in the slightest. Like I’ve already said, he piqued our interest when he beat the Demon Lord’s army. And the summons this time are in light of his defeating the Demon Overlord... I’m sure His Highness wishes to extend words of praise toward him.”

“I see...” Rem patted her chest down with relief.

“...But there is one thing I’m dubious about,” Noah said, lowering his voice.

“Huh?”

“Those Enslavement Collars.”

“Wh-What about them?”

“To those without knowledge of your circumstances, they would look like 《Slave Collars》. If the kingdom of Greenwood were to dispatch slaves for the audience with His Majesty, it would come across as a rude act on par with declaring war.”

“Ah...”

Rem had considered that, but they had no way of removing them.

“No...” Shera’s expression clouded over with anxiety.

“But I am somewhat adept with magic,” Noah suggested. “I could make it so they would be invisible to the eyes of others. What do you say? I would need to ensure you weren’t given any strange orders, though.”

Shera had had her collar rendered invisible for the sake of a wedding ceremony before. At the time, it was the prime minister of Greenwood, Drango,

that applied the obfuscation magic. It was apparently extremely advanced magic, and not something that could be easily imitated.

Rem considered the offer, and concluded there were no other options.

“...Understood.”

“Right!”

Shera agreed as well, and so it was decided. Noah nodded and reached out his right hand.

“Hmm... I see...”

The expression on his face was a grave one. They had felt as awkward as having invited a stranger into their home, but for Noah, it was just business. Without regard for one’s position or language, letting a person with an Enslavement Collar meet the king put the fate of the country at risk. What if they had been given orders to assassinate someone?

After confirming no odd orders were given, Noah used his obfuscation magic.

“《Disguise》.”

The moment Noah whispered that word, the collars were rendered invisible. That alone made it clear he was an even more skilled sorcerer than Drango. Even without regard to his position as minister, he was a very high-level sorcerer!

Touching the collar made it clear that it was still there, but the others couldn’t see it.

“Pardon me for the trouble.” Noah bowed. “I think this will spare us His Majesty’s anger and any misunderstandings on behalf of the ministers...”

Thud! The room suddenly shook. Rem’s expression turned suspicious.

“An earthquake?” Shera cocked her head.

“...There was only one tremor. It was like an explosion of magic.”

This room was particularly close to the center of the royal castle. If the tremors reached this far, it must have been a very large-scale explosion. And there weren’t many sorcerers capable of producing blasts that powerful.

Could it be Diablo?!

But he should have been in Faltra.

There was a knock at the door, and a nervous voice called out from outside.

“Milord, we have an urgent report!”

Noah bowed again, smiling at Rem and Shera.

“I apologize for the ruckus. It seems something has happened, so you’ll have to excuse me. I personally guarantee your safety in this place, so you have no cause for concern. Please spend your time comfortably until the day of your audience.”

“...We are adventurers. We can be of help to you.”

“Hmm. I do not know how business is handled in Faltra, but... In this castle, guests are to act as guests. Please leave matters to me and the imperial knights.”

His tone was polite, but the rejection in his words was clear.

“...I understand.”

Rem backed down. She didn’t want to antagonize him here. They would likely have to stay a few more days until their audience.

But what Rem didn’t know was that they would be summoned to the audience chamber that very night.

†

Needless to say, the explosion powerful enough to shake the entirety of the capital of Seven Wall was the result of the composite magic Diablo used to destroy the God of Destruction, Europa.

Diablo sat within the wavering carriage, which brought him to Castle Grandiose. It didn’t feel like this in the game, but it was grand indeed. A massive product of architecture. Just the sight of it uplifted the heart of man.

Diablo suddenly noticed that the structure of the walls was oddly distinct. The walls of Faltra, a frontier city, were made by piling up stones, the same as how medieval castle walls were made in Diablo’s own world. But Castle Grandiose’s

walls had no seams, as if they were made out of concrete.

“...Hm.”

It never bothered him in the game, but this was another world. If a building existed, it was because someone erected, repaired and maintained it.

I guess, given that this world has guns, construction using concrete isn't all that unusual.

The large man sitting opposite of Diablo—Maximum Abrams—asked, “Sir Diablo, just where did you gain so much power?”

His intellectual face clashed with his bulky, muscular body. His black hair was parted to the side, and he wore black-rimmed glasses.

“Hmph... An adventurer naturally gains strength as he travels.”

At least, that's how it worked in the game.

“Perhaps, but you only registered as an adventurer last year. Were you an adventurer in another country before that...?”

They'd thoroughly looked into him. Diablo couldn't help but feel irritated by that.

“Hmph...” Diablo scoffed in what was neither denial nor affirmation.

He doubted Maximum would believe him if he said, “I leveled up in the game and got summoned into this world in the shape of my in-game avatar.” Even Diablo himself didn't understand the logic behind it yet.

“You looked into me... But you're even more suspicious than I am. Where did you gain so much skill?” Diablo asked back.

The Order of Palace Knights was a gathering of skilled warriors. They were all certainly above level 100, and Maximum led them, so he had to have been powerful. And this world wasn't like the game. There was no respawning after death, damage was real pain, and healing and recovery didn't come down to a single click of the mouse. Diablo understood this well enough because he'd leveled up as a warrior in this world.

“Heheh...” Maximum's lips contorted into a smile. “Same as you, I'd say.”

You're a player, too?!

He'd almost let that slip, but realized this was a typical case of "luring in." If he were to fall for this and let his tongue slip, he wouldn't be capable of maintaining his Demon Lord role play.

If he was the same as him, Maximum would speak the tongue of his old world, but from the movements of his lips, Diablo could tell he was speaking Lyferia's language. In other words, the fact he was needlessly using the language of this place proved he was without a doubt different from Diablo.

"Foolish nonsense."

"Not necessarily. But you seem to have grounds to see me as different from you. Fascinating."

"Hmph..."

Diablo stuck to his confident approach, but was struggling to hold back his surprise.

God damn, this guy's dangerous!

"And I do wonder what basis you have to think... Oh, it seems we've arrived."

The carriage stopped, and, as the door opened, Maximum got off first. A man with a long, red coat stood there at the ready: a blond Elf with a black sword.

"Do not do anything suspicious. If you try anything, I, Thanatos the Undying, will cut you down!"

His name sounded like the boasting of a delusional middle-schooler, but he may well have been immortal. Europa had in fact killed him once, but he returned unharmed.

"Thanatos, he's a guest of His Highness right now, yes?"

"Yes, of course, but..." Thanatos backed down as Maximum glared at him.

Judging from this exchange, Maximum was likely quite skilled after all. A dangerous foe, to be sure, and one Diablo wasn't interested in antagonizing.

"I am a busy man." Diablo got off the carriage. "Hurry up and bring me to your king."

“Well, I was merely ordered to ‘bring you over.’ The rest depends on His Highness.”

They were in the royal castle’s courtyard, a place Diablo had visited many times in *Cross Reverie*. Behind them were the great castle gates. Aside from Maximum and Thanatos, there was a surprising number of guards and stable boys around them. And before a moment could even pass, an old butler approached them and bowed.

“I thank you for coming, king of Greenwood—Your Highness, Diablo Greenwood.”

“Hmm.”

“The king of Lyferia, His Majesty Delouche Xandros, awaits you. Please, follow me.”

“An audience already?!” Thanatos couldn’t hide his surprise.

“I suppose His Highness knows the importance of these matters after all...” Maximum looked shocked as well.

His tone was polite, but his words carried a rather disrespectful nuance. Led by the old butler, Diablo made his way into the building. Maximum and his group didn’t follow.

“Phew...”

Diablo exhaled in relief. If he could help it, he’d rather not have to face Maximum. He doubted he’d lose to the man in a one-on-one, but it felt like he could see through his acting. And without his Demon Lord character, he could barely hold a conversation. If his acting were to be pointed out, he would only be able to reply with a lame stammering of “uuu” and “aaah.”

†

They advanced down a corridor lined with artwork. One would usually expect this kind of place to be full of paintings of beautiful women, or at least an equal measure of men and women, but all Diablo could see were sculptures and portraits of naked men. Handsome boys; well-proportioned, good-looking men; muscular machos...

“...Are these the king’s preferences?”

Diablo doubted he would get along with him if that were the case.

“Usually, you’d have to wait in the castle for several days...” the butler said in a confused fashion.

“Huh?”

“But this time, the king ordered to have you brought over at once, so I apologize deeply. A meeting between the king of Lyferia and the king of a neighboring country would usually have much more meticulous planning and preparation, I assure you.”

“Ah, no...”

Diablo was the one who refused the first request for an audience, and he eventually only came because Maximum dragged him over by holding Lumachina’s and Horn’s lives hostage.

“A meeting between the new kings of Lyferia and Greenwood. Such a historical event... According to tradition, we would spend a month summoning representatives from other countries, and hold the meeting in a special site capable of housing ten thousand people.”

“Heh, heheheh...”

If you did that, I’d run! Me, meeting a king in front of ten thousand people? Never!

Stopping in front of a large set of doors, the butler lowered his head.

“I’m greatly ashamed that we couldn’t make any preparations for your momentous meeting and can only hold it here in the audience chamber. But do pardon us, for the sake of prosperity between both our kingdoms.”

“Heh... It’s a trifling matter. I am not small enough a man to mind trivialities.”

He might have been acting the part of a Demon Lord, but he was a firm believer that peace was the best course of action. And the king of Lyferia, Diablo reasoned, should be aware of his strength, so it would likely be a harmless dialogue. At least, he hoped so.

The doors opened, revealing a red carpet. Heavily armored soldiers holding halberds stood on both sides of it, as were a number of the king's subjects, like ministers and generals. And upon the podium was a throne occupied by a middle-aged man. He seemed to be in his late thirties. The Humans of Lyferia mostly lived into their sixties, so he was fairly young for a king. He didn't have Galford's powerful sense of presence, nor was he overflowing with magic.

I don't know about his leadership skills, but, for an individual, he looks completely average.

Apparently, rumors of Diablo were already circulating, because the gathered ministers were whispering amongst each other.

"...Is that...?"

"The adventurer that defeated the Demon Overlord?"

"Look at those horns..."

"A mere Demon..."

He didn't feel very welcome. Still, the minister standing right beside the king extended words of greeting.

"Welcome, Sir Diablo Greenwood."

The minister had the appearance of a handsome, androgynous boy, or so Diablo thought. He had no way of knowing that this was Duke Noah Gibun, the effective prime minister of Lyferia, who decided most of the country's policies in the king's stead.

Diablo thought naming himself was the thing he had to avoid the most, and so he was grateful Noah saved him the trouble of doing so, breathing out in relief. That, however, resulted in some of the ministers audibly muttering, "the nerve of him...", which made Diablo stiffen. Was there something he should have said right now? He didn't let it be seen, but he was grinding his teeth together in suspense.

Well, what did you expect?! I'm a shut-in NEET gamer! How am I supposed to know how to act in the presence of a king?! You drag me here against my will and then act like I'm being disgraceful?! You're the ones that need to be

ashamed of yourselves! Though, I guess it is my fault for being ignorant...

Had it not been for his Demon Lord persona, he surely would have flinched and hung his head. He was always prone to depression. He had a veritable mountain of things to say, but didn't want to spark a war between Lyferia and Greenwood. He'd have to put up with this.

The minister, Noah, moved things along.

"Firstly, we've summoned the people you're most concerned about, Sir Diablo."

"Mm?"

With Noah giving a signal, a different door opened, and two women walked into the room. A petite girl with black cat ears and a tail, and a blond Elf with overflowing bosoms.

†

It was Rem and Shera!

But they weren't in their usual attire. They were clad in dresses that made them look like young ladies of nobility. Rem's dress was the color of red wine and adorned with cute frills, while Shera's was a light blue one that accentuated her large chest.

Frankly speaking, Diablo doubted his eyes. They were simply so unlike their usual selves, gorgeous and displaying proud dignity. And most of all...

Their collars are gone?!

Diablo was shocked. At the same time, Rem's eyes widened in shock.

"...Di—"

"Diabloooooooooo!"

Shera was the first to run to him. Apparently, she'd forgotten how she was dressed, and her chest jolted as she clung to him.

"H-Hey... Shera?!"

"Whoaaaaaa, Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!"

He could tell from the flow of her magical energy that the collar was simply rendered invisible. He could understand why, since they were in an audience chamber, but...

“Did something happen?!”

Her reaction was so extreme, Diablo started suspecting something had happened, but Shera shook her head.

“I’m just happy to see you again after so long!”

“O-Oh.”

“...You...” Rem heaved a sigh. “Consider the situation, won’t you? We’re in His Majesty’s presence.”

“Ah.”

It wasn’t just the king, but also many of his ministers, generals and guards. With all those gazes directed at her, even Shera couldn’t help but smile in embarrassment as she let go of Diablo.

It can’t be.

Diablo shivered on the inside. All the willpower he’d built up to face the king of Lyferia withered. That’s how it felt.

I guess I really am a normie who should go to hell, huh?

Rem clicked her heels together and bowed silently before the king.

“Your Majesty, King Delouche Xandros of Lyferia. It is with the most profound honor and pleasure that we make your acquaintance. I am Rem Galleu. The young lady over there is Shera L. Greenwood. We are both wives to Diablo.”

Her appearance and demeanor were almost mystifyingly elegant and dignified. Those who found fault with Diablo’s attitude had nothing to say in opposition to her. In other words, Rem’s perception of manners and etiquette was correct.

“Hmm.” The king gave a small nod.

With this, Noah began steering the conversation again.

“It seems that you’ve gone through much in recent times, with the Demon

Overlord being revived and both Fallen and magical beasts running amok, but we are still glad to see you of Greenwood's royal house reunited despite that."

No, me avoiding this audience has nothing to do with the Demon Overlord. And you call it a happy reunion, but we've been acting separately because you ordered us to come here!

So he thought, but he didn't let those words be anything more than thoughts.

"...We're grateful for your concern and Lord Noah's consideration."

Again, not a complaint from the king's retainers.

"Gotta hand it to Rem," Shera whispered.

"Right."

She always handled negotiating with the coaches and inns, she was knowledgeable when it came to camping out, and she even knew how to carry herself around royalty.

Isn't she kind of really amazing?

He'd always thought she wasn't a typical adventurer, but...

Noah went into the main topic.

"Sir Diablo, from what we've heard, you've earned quite a few achievements by engaging the Demon Overlord in battle at the city of Faltra..."

Diablo wasn't sure how to answer that, but decided he'd answer as he always did. It would be better if those standing across from him were to perceive him as dangerous.

"Hmph..." he replied grandly. "Any who turn their blades against me will be annihilated, that's all. Even if they're the Demon Overlord."

The retainers stirred. They'd heard the rumors, but seeing the person in question confirm it made things different, it seemed.

"So it was true." "But they say he's an elemental sorcerer?" "A hero..." "A Demon... I never would have imagined..." "But he's not affiliated with the mage's guild..."

Ridiculous, Diablo sighed to himself. *Does your race or position really matter*

when you're fighting an enemy? If that's what his retainers are like, I guess you can only expect so much from the king. Aaah... I wanna go home already...

If he had to describe it, he wanted to go home as much as a new worker forced to work overtime for the first time, but by now, he felt like he was called in for work on his day off. Simply unbearable for a NEET.

“From what the reports say, you single-handedly charged inside the Demon Overlord when he assumed the form of a massive castle and subsequently defeated him?” Noah asked.

What changed the tide of battle was Diablo's 《Gravity Abyss》 spell, but what dealt him the most damage was Diablo reflecting the Overlord's 《Flames of Ruination》 spell back at him. And despite everything, what dealt the finishing blow was using an elixir, but Diablo doubted they would believe that. In the end, he decided there was no need to go into the small details.

“Hmph... It matters not what form my foe may take. I merely smote them down for the insolence of attacking my base.”

Unrest spread among the retainers again.

“‘My base’?”

“Did the king of a neighboring country just cite territorial rights as a reason to defend Faltra?”

Could you stop picking apart every little thing I say, you pedantic idiots?!

Rem hurried to the rescue.

“...Diablo may be the king of Greenwood, but he's also an adventurer intent on defending the races! The city of Faltra is his base of operations!”

The whispers grew fainter.

“An adventurer?” “And he's a king...?” “Greenwood *does* produce many mercenaries...” “The king himself?” “So an adventurer became a king...?” “Fitting for a small country, I suppose...”

Noah then asked, “I hear you beat the Demon Overlord with elemental magic, Sir Diablo?”

“Correct.”

In Lyferia, when one said magic, they mostly meant summoning. Elemental magic was perceived as weak and useless by most everyone.

†

Eventually, one of the people present stepped forward, a relatively young man with a glint in his eyes who was clad in a uniform adorned with a jumble of decorations.

“I find that impossible to believe!”

“Mm?” Diablo glared at him.

The man reacted by glaring back.

“I am a major of the Lyferian military, Harold William! It doesn’t matter how much you level up elemental magic, it can only match up to a large summon beast! And you defeating the Demon Overlord is a lie! Your Majesty, this man is a charlatan! I doubt the proud, haughty Elves would ever accept a Demon as their king to begin with!”

Which made sense, when he mentioned it... Diablo’s mannerisms and, indeed, his entire existence, were far removed from this world’s idea of common sense.

“It’s not a lie!” Shera argued. “Diablo is the king! B-Because he...m-m-married me!”

“The Elves are a slender race! I doubt this girl is even an Elf!”

“That’s mean!”

Shera seemed to take offense to that, because there were tears welling up in her eyes.

“...You’re right.” Rem’s eyes widened.

“Not you too, Rem?!”

“You horned Demon!” Major William approached Diablo with a smug smile. “If you claim your words are true, present some proof!”

“Don’t believe me if you don’t want to.” Diablo shrugged.

“What?!”

Diablo was used to people not believing him. People tend to look not at what they’re asking, but who they’re asking. And since he never had friends...

“If your claims are true, then I didn’t defeat the Demon Overlord nor am I Greenwood’s king. In which case, what reason was there to even call me here?”

Rem shrugged.

“...That would be the conclusion, yes. We have no reason to be graced an audience with His Majesty.”

Her tone was quite thorny. It seemed Rem was internally annoyed that Diablo and Shera were being cast into doubt.

“I’m leaving.” Diablo turned his back to the king.

Shera clung to his arm. “Don’t leave me here!”

The retainers were quite confused, but no one tried to detain them.

“Major William...?” Noah asked with a chilly voice.

The foul-eyed military man rushed in front of Diablo.

“W-Wait!”

“Hmph... Move away if you do not wish to come to harm, weakling.”

“Weakling?! You call me, who reached the rank of Major at the age of thirty, a weakling?!”

“Like I care.”

Diablo neither knew nor cared at which age it was impressive to reach which rank.

“Feeding the king lies is blasphemy!” William unsheathed his sword. “I will not spare you!”

“Kyaa?!” Shera took cover behind Diablo.

“...Let it be known you were the one who drew first.” Rem braced herself.

“What level are you, fool? Answer honestly if you value your life.” Diablo declared haughtily.

“Wh-What?!”

“Answer me. If your level is too low, my magic may blow you to bits.”

“You would insult a major of the great Lyferian military?! When you’re a useless elemental sorcerer and a despicable Demon!?”

William brandished his sword upward. Too slow. Was he level 40? That did make him an above average warrior in this world.

“Imbecile... 《Glacies Cannon》!”

It was a spell that launched a massive block of ice, but Diablo’s massive stores of magical energy produced a block that was far larger than an adult man. It took off with massive speed; if William were to be hit directly by it, he would likely lose all semblance of a human shape.

Diablo missed on purpose, so the spell would only hit William’s brandished sword. The block of ice then flew behind him, piercing the audience chamber’s wall with a thundering sound. But it didn’t end there. The walls looked to be made of concrete, but were apparently softer than imagined. Or maybe his Glacies Cannon was simply stronger than he knew, because it went on to pierce several more layers of wall.

The sight of the setting sun poured in through the hole. William sank to the floor, his eyes bloodshot and frothing from the mouth.

“Hiii, hiyaaaaaaaaaaa?!”

He had pissed himself.

The other ministers were running around in a panic, as were the generals and armored soldiers, but the latter remembered their roles and stood with their swords and spears at the ready. Shera’s and Rem’s faces went pale.

“Di-Di-Diablo!”

“Wasn’t using such powerful attack magic in a place like this overdoing it...?!”

I figured it’d just crack the walls a little...

But a Demon Lord never wavers.

“Hmph... You call that attack magic?” Diablo scoffed in a confident façade.

“That was a mere greeting. If I were to attack seriously, this entire castle would be wiped from the map.”

Noah narrowed his eyes. He had been the one to spur William, and perhaps he’d considered the situation, because he didn’t seem to be panicking.

“True to the rumors. According to reports, you present yourself not as a Demon, but by another title.”

“Mm.”

“A Demon Lord from another world.”

The retainers went into the largest frenzy yet. Some even screamed outright. Diablo gradually started panicking.

This is bad. I don’t have the conversation skills to calm this chaos down.

If a fight were to break out in the castle, he wasn’t confident he could defend Rem and Shera, and he didn’t want to needlessly kill any soldiers. All he wanted was to threaten them, scare them, and avoid battle that way!

He called out, “That’s right! I am Diablo! A Demon Lord from another world!” as he made the most villainous expression he could.

But internally, he was cradling his head in exasperation.

Aaaaah, I knew it would end up like this. I ended up calling myself a Demon Lord in front of the king of Lyferia. See, this is why I was trying to avoid this audience. Am I a criminal now? A menace to society? A wanted man? Dead or alive? Fare thee well, my easy other-world life, and hello and good day, my life on the run!

A rolling laughter filled the room.

And to everyone’s surprise, it came from someone who had been sitting so still and so silent that one might have suspected he’d actually been a mannequin all along—King Delouche Xandros.

“Kahahaha! A Demon Lord, are you?!”

“…”

Diablo glanced at the king.

“An adventurer and the king of Greenwood, a Demon Lord?” the king asked.

“That’s the truth of it. I’m not trifling enough to rely on lies and sneaking about.”

I’m just role playing as a Demon Lord, though...

“And it’s true you defeated the Demon Overlord Modinaram?” Delouche leaned forward.

“Enough of this. Shall I show you my true power?”

“No, no, I’ve seen more than enough. I’ve seen enough people boast and make a show of their strength, but it’s the first time I’ve seen Grandiose’s walls broken through enough to give me a view of the sky.”

“Hmph. Then all the ones you’ve seen so far have simply been that lowly.”

Though I guess another way of looking at it is that no one’s been crazy enough to bust down the walls, I guess...

“You’re an interesting man, Diablo. You call yourself a Demon Lord, but defend the races’ cities. A Demon Lord usually butchers the races, does it not?”

Have you tried offering them biscuits?

“Hmph... I’ve no interest in whether the races live or die.”

“So, Sir Diablo is a Demon Lord from another world,” Noah whispered. “So that means... He’s different from the Demon Lords of this world?”

“I see!” Delouche nodded in understanding. “In which case, Diablo! Will you serve me?”

“Huh?!”

His retainers went pale. Noah knitted his brows in a frown. Delouche, however, stuck to his opinion.

“I abhor tradition. Just who decided these formalities and regulations, and when? Where one lives, what they eat, even the language they’re allowed to speak—all of these things were decided ahead of time, long ago. Am I not king? Why must I bow to the decisions of past rulers?”

“...”

“No king in Lyferia’s history has ever had a Demon Lord serve them. Diablo, serve under me!”

The king was clearly excited.

“I...” Diablo opened his mouth to reply.

But before he could declare, *I refuse*, Noah proposed:

“His Majesty, Diablo is king of Greenwood, and a Demon Lord, even if he is from another world. Serving under a king means allowing another country to rule his own. Remember that saying things that would disturb the peace and create diplomatic friction will do you no good.”

“However!”

“I don’t believe any past king has ever brokered peace with a Demon Lord either, Your Majesty. Even without his servitude, I believe that would be more than enough to etch your name in history’s annals.”

“...Hmph... Indeed.”

Diablo was relieved to see the excitement die down, as were the king’s retainers. Rem and Shera sighed in relief, too.

“What should I do then?” Delouche asked Noah.

“I recommend that you start by acknowledging Diablo as king of Greenwood and affirm that the two countries’ amity stands strong.”

“And what else? Is there no way to make it known to the lords of the surrounding countries that I have brokered peace with a Demon Lord?”

Noah pondered for a short while.

“Sir Diablo is an adventurer, as well. How about he completes a request in your name? There is the matter from this morning.”

“Oh!” Delouche’s expression lit up. “Splendid idea, Noah!”

Ugh, this looks like it’s going in an annoying direction. Still, it’s better than being chased out of the kingdom like a criminal and having war break out between Lyferia and Greenwood.

Shera listened quietly, and Rem spoke in place of Diablo, who wasn’t much for

holding a discussion.

“...So you acknowledge Diablo as an adventurer and wish to make a request of him, Your Majesty?”

“Indeed!”

Noah explained the details:

“Our southern frontier fortress, Caliture, has recently fallen to an assault by wild beasts.”

“...Caliture,” Rem said, a noticeable shiver in her voice.

“Saving a city of the races from an assault by beasts—the very image of an adventurer’s task,” Noah continued. “However, the enemy was strong enough to topple two of the kingdom’s fortresses garrisoned by our soldiers. A giant spriggan has appeared, as well... It will be no easy task.”

All traces of expression drained from his face, leaving the impression of him wearing a mask.

A spriggan, huh.

In *Cross Reverie*, spriggans served as guards that prevented players from going into important areas. The fact that one attacked a fortress of the races was quite different from anything that happened in the game.

“...What should we do, Diablo?” Rem asked anxiously.

The enemy sounded strong, but being branded a criminal, starting a war, or becoming servant to the king sounded like overall worse options. He wasn’t exactly one for living in luxury in another world, but he wanted to wake up whenever he wanted, eat whenever it struck his fancy, and take quests from time to time.

And he’d finally become free. Why would he have to cast aside that easy life and take a job now?! He hated talking to other people, so showing up for work was almost impossible for him.

“It is bothersome, but... Well, if you offer a quest, I suppose I shall accept it.”

Rem nodded and shifted to the actual negotiations.

“...And what would be our reward?”

“Of course, we’ll prepare a suitable sum for your work. I hear that Greenwood recently fell under attack from the Fallen and suffered considerable losses. What say you that the king of Lyferia will send monetary aid to your kingdom? Rest assured, it will be a sum that any country will certainly be pleased to receive.”

“...We thank you for your sympathy.”

Noah’s offer was said so promptly that it almost sounded like he had planned for this ahead of time.

“Nn...” Shera cast down her eyes.

She would always babble without thinking too much about what she was saying, so seeing her swallow her words was an unusual sight.

“Very well!” Delouche clapped. “Diablo, go forth and exterminate the beasts attacking Caliture!”

The conclusion was clear, and, normally, one would simply bow their head and leave.

However!

Diablo pulled out his 《Tonnerre Empereur》.

“Hmph!”

“Hmm?”

Delouche tilted his head quizzically, while Noah was the first to be filled with a sense of suspense.

“Wh-What are you doing, Sir Diablo?!”

Even if it had all been decided, he wouldn’t be a Demon Lord if he let this slide. He aimed his staff at the king.

“Make no mistake! I am not obeying your orders. I merely lend you my strength since you requested it. Do not delude yourself into thinking you have a Demon Lord in your service!”

“Di...”

“...ablo?!”

Rem and Shera were shocked. Noah’s shoulders trembled as beads of sweat rolled down his forehead.

“...Kh.”

There were some among the king’s retainers who seemed ready to leap at Diablo already. Murderous tension filled the room... Except for Delouche. The king grinned broadly.

“Kahaha! Wonderful! I’ll commit it to memory! But don’t forget, I am the king of Lyferia—ruler of the races! Never will I tremble before a Demon Lord!”

“Hmph... I see that you’re not a coward who hides in the safety of his castle.”

“I will have you show me that the power that defeated the Demon Overlord is real.”

“Hmph. Who do you think you’re talking to?!”

The two glared at each other with indomitable smiles on their lips. Diablo then turned his back and made to leave the audience chamber.

“Ah, wait for meee!” Shera tottered after him in a half-jog.

Rem regarded the king with a flustered bow and took off after them. While the king saw them off with a smile, Noah’s expression was as cold as ice.

Chapter 2: Heading to the Southern Frontier

When given the choice between accompanying ten thousand soldiers sent as reinforcements or taking a carriage that would go on ahead first, Diablo chose the latter.

His reasoning wasn't that he wanted to defend the races' city from the threat of the beasts as soon as possible, but rather that he absolutely hated the idea of traveling with so many strangers. Of course, minimizing the races' casualties was important, too.

And so, Diablo and his group boarded a large carriage of four horses and made their way south. They left the day after their audience (which was officially considered a conference), and seven days after leaving the capital...

They were on a mountain trail that couldn't quite be called a road. On their left was the mountain, and on their right was a valley. The trees grew thick, and, at times, branches got in their way, meaning they would have to stop and have their escorts cut their way through. In the passenger compartment of this carriage, which was large enough to fit eight people, sat only Diablo, Rem, and Shera on a plank board that served as a bench.

Since it was a military carriage, it only had a small window for lighting. It was dim and they could hardly see what went on outside. The roof was loaded with plenty of food and water, and the driver sat at the reins outside with two escorts. These escorts were soldiers that would guide them to the battlefield, but their role was most likely to also watch over them. They kept their distance from Diablo's group even when they stopped to eat and hardly conversed with them.

They continued their ride through the mountain trail, with Rem being visibly pale.

"Ugh... It's a good thing this is a large carriage. A normal one would shake so much more, and I don't know if I'd be able to take it."

“You’re still weak to moving vehicles, are you?”

“...Yes.”

Shera, on the other hand, was uncharacteristically quiet. She looked out the small window and sighed. She was usually so thoughtless and bubbly, running around with her breasts bouncing despite her clothes, so it was unusual to see her like this.

Diablo did find it curious, but... If he were the type to reach out and talk at times like these, he wouldn’t be so cripplingly socially inept. So Diablo stuck to his silence, but Rem asked.

“...Is something wrong, Shera?”

“Mmm.”

An uncharacteristically vague response.

“...This isn’t like you. Don’t be shy and just tell us.”

“I’m not being shy... I just don’t really understand it myself.”

“...I don’t really understand what you’re saying, though there’s nothing unusual about that.”

“Aaaaah.”

It was a pretty harsh assessment from Rem, but it did make it easier to speak to Shera. After a short pause, Shera parted her lips to speak, “Well, you see... The kingdom of Lyferia attacked the Elven forest in the past, right? They called the Dark Elves Demon Lord worshipers.”

“...That’s what I’ve heard, yes.”

The king from three generations ago sent an armed force called a crusade, and the Dark Elves were driven out of the bountiful forests and forced to live in the poisonous, toxic woods. The surviving Dark Elves loathed Lyferia’s Humans for driving them out, as well as the Elves for abandoning them in their time of need.

Currently, they were heading for peace at Shera’s suggestion, but...

“This might be a thing of the past for the Humans, and Father has made peace

with the kingdom of Lyferia,” she said, “But there are still Dark Elves who lived through those horrible things.”

“...You can’t forgive Lyferia?”

“No, that’s not it. I just don’t want something like that to happen again... And I want them to understand that the Dark Elves aren’t Demon Lord worshipers.”

“...I agree.”

“So I wanted to say that to the king, but I didn’t get the chance.”

“...That’s pretty well thought-out, coming from you.”

“Huh?”

Rem sighed.

“...You know how they say that there’s a proper time and place for everything?”

“Prop-her?” Shera tilted her head quizzically.

“...It means you have to pick the right time and place to talk to some people. Would appealing to the king about the Dark Elves’ innocence and the suffering they’ve been subjected to until now have been the right thing to do? I believe it would have been thoughtless. And I don’t think we were in the right place, either. An audience isn’t the right place to make selfish demands of the king.”

Really?

Diablo had a feeling he should have been quite surprised with himself over how selfishly he’d spoken back there.

“...And most of all, it wasn’t the right time,” Rem continued. “It was the worst possible time. The dignitaries were beside themselves with anger. A fight could have started at any moment.”

“Yeah, I was really scared!”

The cause of said dangerous atmosphere could, of course, be attributed to one particular person.

“...So, what were you doing in the capital, Diablo?” Rem sent a cold glare in Diablo’s direction.

The question felt like she'd spat out something she had kept bottled up until now.

Well, I can't tell her I got a coupon for a monster girl soapland, can I? It's embarrassing! And some people think going to a brothel is cheating. Not that I went to the capital with the intention of going to a brothel! My intention was to switch Rem's ring, after all...

There were double and triple reasons for him to not be honest about it.

"Hmph..." Diablo folded his arms. "I thought a situation might arise that you might not be able to resolve on your own!"

"...True enough. Doing this quest would have been impossible without you, Diablo."

"That's right!"

I dodged the question!

Rem turned the conversation back to Shera.

"...Let's calm down and try to think this through. Lyferia isn't going to send soldiers to the Dark Elves' village anymore."

"Right."

"...The discrimination toward the Dark Elves is still a problem, but complaining to His Majesty about it won't do much to fix it."

"It's not that simple, right?"

"...I understand how you feel... But if you don't choose the right time to say it, you won't get the result you want. Saying whatever you want whenever it crosses your mind is a child's behavior."

"I understand. Thanks, Rem."

"Don't mention it... You're becoming more mature, little by little."

"Heehee..."

Rem was a bit younger than Shera, but acted like an older sister. Diablo felt the same way, though. The Dark Elves had an arduous life imposed on them, all because of a misunderstanding relating to a ritual connected to the Demon Lord

that'd been passed down to them. He thought they deserved to be saved. In this audience, however, Diablo nearly had himself branded as an insolent criminal and traitor.

If this quest goes well, maybe we can appeal to the king about it. It depends on the atmosphere when we meet the king again, but...

That thought passed idly through his mind.

"By the way, where are we going next?!" Shera suddenly changed the topic.

As soon as someone compliments her, she returns to this behavior.

"...The southern frontier city, Caliture," Rem answered, glaring at her reproachfully.

"Hmm? Rem, did something happen to you there?"

"Huh? Why are you asking...?"

"I mean, your expression went all dark when you said that name."

Diablo looked at Rem fixedly. He hadn't noticed that sort of shift in her expression.

"...You have a knack for being perceptive about the oddest things." Rem shrugged.

"So something did happen?"

"...Caliture is—"

As soon as she was about to finish that sentence, the carriage shook violently.

"Kyaaaah?!"

Surprisingly enough, the one to scream and cling to him was Rem. It was usually Shera who jumped at him in times like these.

Diablo caught her slender body. He wasn't used to touching girls yet, but managed to catch her in a time of emergency. He was used to that much.

"Are you all right, Rem?"

"Uuu... I'm sorry. I get anxious when my feet are off the ground, and then it shook, too..."

When she shivered so much, she looked like a kitten.

“It looks like something happened.”

The carriage shook harder and Diablo felt his body be pushed back. They were picking up speed. Moving fast on such uneven soil was dangerous, and it wasn't like they were in a hurry to reach their destination.

Diablo looked around the compartment.

“Shera, where are you?”

Rem was frightened in Diablo's arms, so Diablo figured Shera was looking outside... But unfortunately, he found her tumbled down onto the floor.

“Aiyaaaahaaaa...”

Her head was spinning, it seemed.

H-Hey, I can see your panties!

†

“What is that monster?!” A shrill voice came from the driver's seat.

Monster?

The military carriage's window was small and unsuited for looking outside. Diablo concluded now wasn't the time to hesitate. With Rem in his arms, he got up and kicked the compartment's right side door open.

A powerful wind blew in immediately and green scenery was flowing behind them. There should have been a valley on the right side of the carriage, but instead, a massive head filled Diablo's field of vision. It was a stout monster with a neck, with holes where its eyes and mouth should be. Diablo recognized it immediately.

“A spriggan!”

It was the type that waited on the outskirts of certain areas in *Cross Reverie*.

Why did it appear in the middle of the road?!

“Is that a spriggan...?!” Rem asked, her eyes wide.

“Hii?!” Shera screeched.

The spriggan swung its thick arm, which had a mallet-like fist at the end. The carriage likely wasn't fast enough to avoid it. If anything, it was just the right speed to make for a prime target. The moment he sensed danger, Diablo's thought speed accelerated.

I have to repel it with magic! No, any spell capable of taking out a monster that large with a metal hide would take too long to chant. If I don't make it, we'll get hit for sure. Maybe I'll be able to take it, but Rem and Shera won't!

"We're jumping off!"

Diablo shouted at the carriage driver. He already held Rem with one hand, so he picked up Shera with the other. With both of them in his arms, he hopped off the carriage.

Flight magic!

They jumped off at high speed, and if they were to land on the scraggy ground, they wouldn't get away unscathed. Diablo took off to the air, and the next moment...

The spriggan's hammer-like fist rammed into the carriage, crushing it. The sounds of metal bending, wood snapping, and the horses' cries filled the air.

"...The driver and the guards..." Rem moaned.

It seemed they didn't jump off. Trying to shake a large monster with speed was reckless. They should have abandoned the carriage and taken refuge in the forest.

"That's awful..." Shera said on the verge of tears.

"...Kuh... What should we do, Diablo?"

"If it's just the three of us, we could fly from here using flight magic."

"...Yes. But..."

In a few days, reinforcements from Lyferia would cross this road. If they let this massive monster be, it would result in countless casualties. The minister even specified this monster as part of the enemies that attacked the stronghold when he gave Diablo this quest, and, as such, it was probably part of the quest's objectives to defeat it.

“Hmph... Any fool who swings their blade at me will be met with fitting retribution!”

Diablo landed near the crushed carriage.

“I’ll make a diversion!”

Rem threw a crystal, summoning the summon beast Stoneman, a giant made of rock. It was called a giant owing to it being twice the size of the races, but compared to the spriggan, which was as large as the capital’s walls, it was miniature.

Stoneman rushed along the road, drawing the spriggan’s attention. Meanwhile, Shera used her own summon beast, Turkey Shot, to survey things from the sky.

“This big one is the only enemy around!”

Their work was surprisingly thorough. They’d always just stayed behind and watched whenever he fought high-level enemies, but now the two of them... Perhaps they’d seen Rose and Sasara serve as vanguards for Diablo before and decided to do the same together. They truly were maturing.

The spriggan brandished its fist again. Meanwhile, Rem’s Stoneman leaped at its face to punch it. A heavy sound echoed and the spriggan’s massive fist crushed Stoneman to bits, which dissolved into a black crystal that returned to Rem’s hand.

It lost without dealing any visible damage... But it did buy more than enough time. Diablo stuck out his staff, the Tonnerre Empereur.

Spriggans are earth element monsters, which means wind attacks are effective.

“...Rumble forth, air, and coil in spirals that gouge into the earth! 《Grand Tornado》!”

A tornado touched down, uprooting the mountain’s trees and tearing through the earth, sucking everything into its vortex. The spriggan’s surface crumbled, fragments flaking off and being thrown into the air. Its thick, hoarse voice rumbled along with the screech of the wind.

It was crying out in pain.

It was so massive that it completely filled Diablo's field of vision, but while physical attacks couldn't dent it, exploiting its weakness was effective. It was durable, but Diablo could beat it with brute force. Its attacks were powerful, but it was sluggish.

As the Grand Tornado's effects died down, it was left with clear cracks in its metallic surface, with black viscous liquid seeping from its insides.

Blood? No, it looks like oil.

Cross Reverie never did display damage like that. For that matter, even when living things took damage, blood and organs didn't come out either.

As it went on its third attack, Diablo fired off another spell. It was a repetition of this simple pattern. The metal giant boasted ridiculous defense, but it couldn't withstand a dozen high-power spells. It swung up both arms, which suddenly bent with a loud noise, tearing and falling off, perhaps from their own weight. The ground rumbled and the spriggan stopped moving.

Diablo wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Phew... Finally."

"...Is it defeated?"

"I knew you could do it, Diablo!"

Rem and Shera rushed over to him.

"Hmph... A small fry like this is... Mm?!"

Before Diablo could finish his sentence, he kicked against the ground in a hurry. He grabbed both girls in his arms, just as he had when he jumped off the carriage, and sent magical energy to his boots, 《The Empty Sky's Gambol》, using flight magic to fly away.

The spriggan's surface turned bright red like hot metal.

Something's wrong!

It was some kind of special action spriggans didn't have in the game. The spriggan, which turned red like hot metal, expanded like mush and burst in a

powerful explosion. Rem and Shera screamed. Caught in the massive blast, Diablo's field of vision spun like a wheel, and he lost sensation of which way was up or down.

"Gaaaah?!"

The spriggan self-destructed?!

His flight magic wasn't automatic. If the caster lost their sense of balance, maintaining the flight became difficult. When he finally came to, his legs had been caught in a tree's branches.

"Gah?!"

"Kyaaaah?!"

"Help meeee..."

†

When he opened his eyes, Diablo found himself looking at a blue sky.

"Ugh..."

"Are you all right, Diablo?"

Rem looked down at him with a concerned expression. Next to her he could see Shera's face.

"Are you okay?"

"Mm. What of you two? You're still alive, but... are you unharmed?"

Diablo sat up. From the looks of things, Rem and Shera were fine.

"...We're all right, thanks to you protecting us when we fell."

"This tree saved us, too!"

At Shera's words, he looked around, seeing that the foliage around them formed a giant palm that caught them.

"Is this possible?!"

"It's a nice tree!" Shera exclaimed happily.

"...Elven royalty must be special." Rem shrugged.

“That’s not true. This one’s just a really nice, kind tree!”

“...No tree, kind or otherwise, saves a normal member of the races like this.”

“There are too trees that do!”

“No, there are not.”

Watching the two bicker for the first time in a while, he scanned over the valley. The mountain road had apparently crumbled from the explosion. Defeating that giant monster was quite well and good, but now their reinforcements would struggle to get through when they arrived.

The wreckage of the carriage wasn’t in sight. It had likely sank to the bottom of the valley with the rest of the road. All around them, the remains of the spriggan were scattered about as black, charred fragments. The fact that it didn’t dissolve into particles of light was proof that it wasn’t a Fallen or a magical beast, but rather a monster in the “beast” category.

The explosion was powerful, but it was still an earth element attack.

Diablo was right to cast the wind element spell, 《Storm Wall》, to block it. This time, they got away safely thanks to the forest’s trees, but... He took an attack in mid-flight, and forgot about the fall damage. In his attempt to protect Rem and Shera, he made a mistake. He was required to take a different course of action from when he was a solo player.

If an enemy was about to self-destruct, he could cast confinement spells like Gravity Abyss and Naraka, or spells that stopped the opponent’s action in a fixed range, like 《Ice Age》. He only got it wrong because it used a special action that didn’t exist in the game, and that annoyed Diablo.

I need to be more adaptable. More careful and thorough.

Unlike the game, this world had no resets or revives. A single error in judgment could make him lose the most precious things. Right now, for example? He could have lost Rem and Shera. The thought of it... sent a shiver down his spine.

The two of them got off the cushion made of leaves.

“...Let’s go, Diablo.”

“No way but to walk on foot.”

The two gazed at where the carriage fell into the valley, offered a silent prayer, and then set out along the mountain road. Shera was sad for a while, but she wasn't one to dwell on things or be depressed to begin with. She was smiling again soon enough.

“It's been so long since it's been just the three of us traveling!”

“...Come to think of it, we've just been moving around in carriages recently.”

“This reminds me of the forest near Faltra's western lakefront!”

“...Yes, traveling is all about going on foot. It doesn't matter how much longer it takes, walking is much better.”

With their carriage gone, it became a trek, and one they didn't know the length of, at that. Rem seemed happy, though.

“I like it when things are nice and easy...” Shera smiled wryly. “Oh, by the way, weren't you going to say something back there, Rem?”

“...”

She seemed hesitant to speak, so Diablo prodded her to continue.

“About the southern frontier city, Caliture.”

“Right, right! It feels like you've got some problems with them.”

With a hint of resignation, Rem started speaking.

“...First, I should explain Caliture in some broad terms. The south of Lyferia is a craggy region covered in a deep forest.”

“Kuh-raggie?”

“An area full of steep mountains.”

“Ooooh.”

Shera looked around, and, indeed, there were mountains as far as the eye could see.

“...It was about a hundred years ago when the king of Lyferia from three generations ago expanded the kingdom's territory that far. So while it's called a

frontier, it's not actually all that new anymore... But that aside, the largest city in this area is the frontier city, Caliture."

Shera nodded with an "uh-huh."

"Like Faltra City is in the Faltra region!"

That's right, now that you mention it. Diablo thought.

He never cared much about that bit of lore in the game.

"...And I..." Rem said, a serious expression on her face. "I was originally born in the frontier city, Caliture."

"Ooh, really." Shera replied with a light tone that almost seemed to disregard Rem's grim demeanor.

But Diablo thought it was strange. In the game, the southern frontier of Caliture existed. It wasn't a large city, but it did have a lot of jolly merchants, and the town's governor prided himself on how "there's nothing you can't buy in this town." It featured an arena, and while it was a lively place, one couldn't call it a refined city...

But still, Caliture didn't seem like a place one would be ashamed enough of living in to make such a big secret out of it. It was then that Diablo recalled that both of Rem's parents had died. Perhaps there were some sad memories to the place. She was a responsible, bona fide adventurer, but she was still only a fourteen-year-old girl.

"Is going back to your hometown hard on you?"

"That's not..." Rem's expression was full of doubt. "Do you two not know about Caliture?"

"I've heard that name before, but that's it." Shera wasn't one to dwell on the little details.

Would saying it's a merchants' city be off the mark here? Diablo thought. If it was, it would be too embarrassing.

This world was similar to *Cross Reverie*, but there were a lot of points where it differed. Diablo then contorted his lips with a "hmph."

“I do know of it, but... You’re still who you are. Why should the matter of whence you came from matter?”

“...You’re right. Thank you. Perhaps I was worrying over nothing.”

Rem’s expression softened, and a faint blush spread over her cheeks. Seeing that expression made Diablo feel embarrassed, too.

†

The second day after they had lost their carriage...

“It’s no goood... It’s too hazy to see the distance.”

It was raining. Shera had sent her summon beast, Turkey Shot, up to the sky, but not only could she not find any trace of Caliture, there weren’t any hints of nearby settlements or roads. Look where they might, all they saw were mountains covered in trees. Perhaps once the rain let up, visibility would increase and they would find something.

“...We might be going in the wrong direction altogether,” Rem said bitterly.

“Huuuh?!” Shera whined.

“...We tried to go along the road we were on before we fought that iron spriggan, but we might have gotten on a different path... Or maybe we forked off it without noticing.”

And true enough, the longer they walked down this path, the narrower it became, and by now, it felt more like an animal trail. Any carriage that would try to go through here would get stranded.

“Isn’t it your hometown?”

“...I’m sorry, but I don’t know how to get there. I left Caliture when I was ten, and it was with a caravan of carriages.”

“So you can’t remember...”

“...I was unconscious at the time.”

“Oh, right, you get sick in vehicles.”

Diablo shrugged.

“Once it clears up, we might see further. We’ve no choice but to wait.”

“...You’re right.”

Diablo had his tough body and Rem was a seasoned adventurer, so they were fine, but Shera was shivering.

“Uuuu... It’s cold...”

“...It’s usually warm in the south, so we didn’t bring any gear for the cold.”

But it was winter after all, and once it started to rain, the temperature dropped more than they’d expected.

“I’m hungryyy.”

“...Unfortunately, all our food and water is in the bottom of the valley with the rest of the carriage. We can gather the rain for drinking water, but can’t you ask the forest for fruit, Shera?”

“That’s what I’ve been doing, but they’re busy drinking water during rainy days, so it’s hard to get the trees to listen. Besides, not all trees are nice.”

“...I suppose things simply don’t come that easily, do they?”

“It’s not like Greenwood, where the Elves take care of the forest.”

Diablo then looked up with a “hmm?” Something swiftly tumbled down toward them. A red fruit. It looked like a tomato.

I don’t remember the game having these.

“Wow, you’re giving this to me?!” Shera exclaimed with twinkling eyes. “Thank you!”

“...Or maybe things do come that easily.” Rem smiled wryly. “The world always has a way of spoiling you, Shera.”

“That’s not true. I work hard for things, too.”

Shera reached for the red fruit, when...

“Not, eat!”

Someone shouted at them, and Diablo could hear something whistling through the air. It was a pebble that shot through and smashed the red fruit. It crashed against the ground with a wet sound, leaving a red puddle that looked vividly like blood.

“Aaaaaaaaah?!” Shera screeched. “What did you do that for?!”

“Is that a beast?!” Rem braced herself.

“Who’s there?!” Diablo took out his staff.

In the gap between the trees was the form of a girl. She was virtually naked, with some fabric covering her body. Diablo found himself looking away reflexively.

“Y-Your skin... Ah, never mind...”

It didn’t matter how she was dressed—she could have been an enemy. He couldn’t let down his guard.

Her hair was brown and she had triangular ears that sat perky on her head. They looked like dog ears, so Diablo thought she might be a Dwarf, but she wasn’t short and her bosoms weren’t very large, either. Also, she had two tails that she was resting on like a cushion. They looked like a fox’s ears and tails, and Diablo didn’t know any Dwarf that fit that description.



To top it off, the look in her eyes seemed different from the races' somehow. He then recalled the girls from the monster girl soapland he'd visited...

"Are you... a Therianthrope?"

The fox-eared girl gasped at Diablo's words.

"You, understand what say?!"

She spoke in a fragmented manner, as if speaking was hard for her.

"Of course I do. Answer me—why did you crush that fruit? Or were you aiming at Shera and missed?"

"No! Red fruit of corpse tree, never eat! Poison!"

"They're poisonous?!"

"One bite, kill! Raise rotten corpse tree!"

She called the tree that dropped this red fruit the corpse tree, and a single bite from it was lethal, making a new corpse tree grow from the bodies of those who consumed it. Diablo dropped his gaze on the tree before him. It looked like a regular tree, but, apparently, it was a type of monster.

"It seems you saved her life."

"Me, Fennely!" The fox-eared Therianthrope introduced herself. *"You, who? Why races, understand what Fennely say?"*

"Hmph... Understanding what you say is nothing before my vast knowledge! I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world!"

"Demon Lord?!" Fennely's eyes widened with surprise.

Apparently having resolved herself, Rem cut into their conversation.

"Diablo! I have a hard time believing it, but can you understand what this beast is saying?"

"Huh? Ah, of course. True, her sentences are a bit fragmented, but I can still piece together what she's saying..."

"All I can hear is barking and whimpering." Shera shook her head.

"You *can* talk, right?" Diablo looked back to Fennely.

But she simply returned a confused glance.

“Races, no understand what Fennely say. Only you.”

In the end, thanks to Diablo serving as interpreter, they were capable of exchanging information. Rem nodded in understanding, apparently satisfied with why Fennely pelted the fruit with the rock.

“...I never knew a plant like that existed.”

Even though this was her hometown, she wasn't familiar with all the toxic plants in the area. Looking closely, there were many dead insects littering the ground around the fallen fruit.

It's a lethal poison, all right.

“Whoaaa, thank you! You saved me!” Shera shuddered.

“She's thanking you,” Diablo told her.

“Fennely, no hate Elf.”

“Apparently, she saved you because you're an Elf.”

With Diablo as the mediator, they somehow managed to hold a friendly conversation. She invited them to her village.

“Some fruit, have. You, come with.”

Rem was a bit cautious, but if it was a trap, they could always defeat her, and if it wasn't, she was willing to spare them some food. Also, she apparently knew of a town of the races, but it was unfortunately pretty far off...

And so, following Fennely's magnificent, bushy tails, Diablo and his group made their way to the Therianthrope village.

†

“...Judging by her hair and tails, I'd say she's a Kobold,” Rem said as they strolled through the forest.

“Oh, a Kobold! Aren't those a type of fairy?”

“...That's one theory of several. Apparently, the females have an appearance that's closer to the races, while the males' appearance leans toward a more

bestial form.”

“I’ve heard stories about them being really nice to the races.”

“...And I’ve heard rumors of them attacking the races’ towns.”

“But she saved me earlier!”

“...Yes, she did.”

Fennely turned around.

“Here, village!”

At first sight, it was a stretch of forest, same as the rest of the places they’d walked through so far. There were no huts between the trees, and it didn’t look like anyone was living on the treetops. It was winter, but the leaves grew thickly enough to serve as a roof, with only scant drops dripping in. The forest floor was covered in fallen leaves, and so they couldn’t see the ground.

Fennely lowered her knees and shook her tails, rubbing them against some fallen leaves coating the base of a tree.

“Wet tail, get dirty! Bad!” she said, drooping her shoulders in relief.

With the leaves brushed away, they found there was a hole in the ground.

“Fennely back!” she shouted into the hole.

And after a short while, others came out from the hole. They were males, and had fox heads. Looking at Diablo, they cocked their heads.

“What races doing here?”

“This one, can talk! A bit food, give!”

“Races who understand what we say?!”

There were apparently a few more holes elsewhere, because the Kobolds were popping out of them. There were about twenty of them, and they surrounded Diablo, looking at him curiously.

“Can talk? What name?”

“I am Diablo.”

“He talk?!” Their eyes widened as they exclaimed.

Most of the Kobolds were female, and, like Fennely, had triangular ears and bushy tails. They were also all scantily dressed, which made it hard for Diablo to look straight at them. The males, like Rem said, had fox heads. Their muscles looked limber and well built, and they had hair growing out of their backs. They were only dressed in loincloths.

“He really talked! Surprise!”

A thinly-furred Kobold, who had his skin visible, raised his voice. He spoke more clearly than Fennely.

“And you are?”

“The elder of this tribe. I am called Yolda. I never expected one of the races to speak to us.”

“Hmph... It is a trifling matter to me.”

Diablo didn’t know how it worked, but he was capable of speaking to them, despite never learning their language, and he could understand what they were saying too. He couldn’t speak to magical or wild beasts, but...

The Kobolds tried speaking to Rem and Shera, but it only came across as growls and yelps to the girls.

“...It sounds like you’re speaking normally to them, Diablo.” Rem cocked her head curiously.

“Yeah! It’s weird that both us and the Kobolds understand what you’re saying!” Shera said cheerfully.

Diablo flapped his cloak and smirked.

“It is because I’m a Demon Lord from another world!”

“Demon Lord?!”

They stiffened for a moment—

Before erupting into laughter.

“Someone from the races is a Demon Lord! That’s a good joke! You’re a funny one!”

Not just the elder Yolda, but the other Kobolds were cackling, holding onto

their bellies.

Diablo was overwhelmed. People had doubted him plenty of times before, but it was the first time he'd been laughed at to his face.

"They, want food!" Fennely said, moving her hands in gestures.

"Yes, that's fine. We have plenty."

At the elder's orders, some of the females crept back into the hole and returned after a short while with dried meat and dried potatoes.

"Ugh..."

Their baskets were also full of dried dead insects. A bit of a hard diet for Diablo and his friends' urban upbringing.

Well, I guess we don't have to force ourselves to eat bugs.

They brought quite a bit of food, so it was like a small feast. Baskets of food were laid over the rug of fallen leaves, with grape wine being served in small wooden containers.

"This is better than rainwater, yes?"

"That it is."

In truth, Diablo wasn't much for alcohol... but, unlike alcohol, which didn't decay easily, water and juices were hard to preserve. Antiseptics didn't exist in this world, after all. But despite not being a drinker, after a few sips of the grape wine, Diablo grew used to it. It didn't have much alcohol anyway.

"Mm? Is this...?"

The wine bottle was a familiar shape. It looked like the type used in Lyferia. Yolda ran his fingers across the bottle's surface.

"This is from a Human town."

"So I thought."

The wooden containers had an elaborate design, too. Considering they lived in burrows under the ground, their lifestyle was rather civilized. The dried meat tasted good, but the dried leaves... didn't. They truly were nothing more than dried leaves, and left a rough sensation in Diablo's mouth.

“So? Where did you come from?”

Saying he came from another world(!) wouldn't advance the conversation any.

“A city called Faltra.”

“Never heard of it.”

“I suppose it is more than ten days away from here by carriage.”

“You came from pretty far away!”

“Is everyone from the village here? I see a lot of women...”

“The men are all out since the day before yesterday. Some trouble happened.”

“Hm.”

“Among the races, the demis are better. Some even trade with us, like the Dwarves who also live underground.”

“Rock Dwarves.”

Apparently, they had visited this village once. They distanced themselves from Lyferia's cities and chose to live in hiding. Diablo found that tendency to shut themselves in to be relatable.

It was pretty awful back then too, though...

“There are some Grasswalkers, too. We don't see Elves and Pantherians too often, though.”

He cast a glance at Rem and Shera. They couldn't exchange words with the other Kobolds, but the girls seemed to be enjoying their meal all the same. There wasn't much need for words when sharing a table, after all.

But then Yolda's foxy face contorted, his brows furrowing.

“But Humans are bad! When they find us, they start firing arrows like they're hunting animals!”

“What?!”

“We've lived in this land for many ages. But the Humans came along and made cities. That's fine. But they try to drive us out. Many of us were killed. It is

unforgivable.”

“Why do the Humans attack you?”

“Probably because we can’t speak Human language,” Yolda spat out spitefully. *“They don’t see us as part of the races because of that.”*

“That’s foolish...”

“You think so?”

“Of course. All the more so because I can understand you. Is there any difference between you and the races?”

“Even if we have fox heads?”

“That doesn’t matter. Treating something unequally because of their appearance or customs is called discrimination. And discrimination is an unforgivable act.”

“Are you sure you’re from the races?”

“Hmph... Do not make me say it again. I am a Demon Lord from another world!”

Yolda cackled loudly.

I guess that’s how they react if I don’t show them magic.

There was something cute and affable to how he laughed, so, despite being somewhat disappointed, Diablo didn’t feel all that bad about it.

In the end, they stayed in the village, as the rain wouldn’t stop. At first, they were a bit anxious to crawl into a hole in the ground, but once they did, they found the hollow was surprisingly wide enough to stand up and walk around in.

The trees served as support pillars and the inner surface was hardened with clay. The place was pleasantly chill with a moistness in the air, and, despite the scent of animal, it seemed perfectly hospitable. Most importantly, since they were underground, the raindrops couldn’t reach them.

Fennely told Diablo about where the races’ city was in extreme detail. Apparently, the forest’s trees had markings on them, so once the weather improved, they wouldn’t have to worry about getting lost. Come nightfall, they

were lent blankets which they used to sleep with their backs to the clay walls.

The following morning, they found it was hard to tell whether it was sunny from inside the hole, to say nothing of the time and the weather. What woke them up was the sound of several sets of footsteps approaching them. To be exact, Rem was the one to notice, and proceeded to elbow Diablo and Shera awake.

“Mm?”

They woke up to find themselves surrounded by burly male Kobolds.

“They demis?”

One exceptionally large male with red fur stood on guard. Diablo half rose to his feet, but before things could get any more complicated, the elder Yolda and Fennely popped out from some other hole and explained they were invited as guests.

“...It seems that red Kobold is the boss around here,” Rem whispered.

Even without understanding what they were saying, Rem could pick up on that from the way Yolda treated the red-furred Kobold. Yolda did say he was the elder, but... apparently that didn't mean he was at the top of the pack.

The red-furred Kobold stood in front of Diablo.

“You understand what we say?”

“Indeed. Introduce yourself to me. I permit it.”

“He really talk?!”

“Of course I did. Or can you not understand me, fool?”

“Ah! Cheeky one! This my village!”

“Hmph...”

“Well, never mind... I chief, Boldboss! Never thought would give name to races!”

“Hmm. Incidentally, is something amiss? You seem perturbed...”

Boldboss exchanged a glance with Yolda. He was put off by Diablo's attitude,

who, despite being a guest in the presence of many, acted as if he was king.

There wasn't much Diablo could do, though. He may have gotten used to speaking to people, but if it wasn't for his Demon Lord role playing, he wouldn't be able to finish a single sentence.

"No business of yours," Boldboss eventually said.

"If you insist, I do not mind, but..."

He still owed them for last night's lodging and the food they shared. If they were in some kind of trouble, he wanted to help them. Still, forcibly getting them to talk would be wrong. His gaze wandered around the other male Kobolds apart from Boldboss, when he noticed something one of them was holding.

A fragment. It looked like a thick, metallic-like shell, its cross section being visibly cracked, and it was sticky with some black, viscous liquid. There were charred marks on it, too.

Could that be...?

"The spriggan..."

"You know it?!" Boldboss's eyes widened at his whisper.

"Ah, no... I mean, yes, of course I do. I am a Demon Lord from another world, so my knowledge knows no bounds."

Three days ago, he'd fired several high firepower spells and forced the spriggan to self-destruct—but he couldn't tell them that, and they naturally didn't suspect he was capable of that.

"This, our guardian deity," Boldboss crossed his arms and said.

"O-Oh..."

Hiding the shiver of stress that ran through him was a challenge. Beasts that worship the spriggan—in other words, they were...

"Three days ago, invaders arrive in road near the valley. Guardian deity go there, and, after a while, big boom."

"Mmm."

"Look like, guardian deity fight someone. And now it like this..."

"I see."

Boldboss glared at the ground in frustration.

"Don't know why. Guardian deity in pieces."

It blew itself up, Diablo thought, but couldn't bear to say.

"Did anyone see what happened?"

"This time, very sudden. By the time we arrive..."

"I see..."

"What we do, Boldboss?!" one Kobold who had black circles around his eyes like a racoon asked. *"Without guardian deity, we can't win!"*

"Stop saying stupid things! Big Human town in reach already! We can win, alone! Drive them away from land! Sure of it!"

Boldboss raised his voice in an impressive cry. But one thing tugged at Diablo's mind.

"Big Human town?"

"Yes... I think they call it, Caliture."

"You're going to attack Caliture?!"

"What...?!" Rem went pale.

"You can't!" Shera raised her voice.

"What women say?" Boldboss and the other Kobolds eyed the girls dubiously.

"Are you the beasts that have been attacking Lyferia's strongholds?" Diablo asked without answering his question.

"We no beasts! We people. Call us Therianthropes, we allow."

"Answer my question."

"Hmph... We are ones who crush Human strongholds, using power of guardian deity."

So the Kobolds were the targets of their quest, after all. The spriggan was

their main force, it seemed, but Diablo had destroyed it.

“This is quite the mess...”

“You are demi. Why side with Humans?”

Diablo was conflicted. His position in this was problematic. The king of Lyferia gave him a quest to hunt down the beasts attacking the races’ towns. But now he owed the Kobolds a debt of gratitude.

And if what they said was true, they lived here first, before the Humans arrived. According to what Rem had said, they had clashed when the kingdom of Lyferia expanded its borders one hundred years ago. That meant the Humans were the invaders here.

“I owe you...” Diablo glared at Boldboss. “...Especially Fennely, a great deal. I cannot return a favor with enmity.”

“Understood. You understand what we say. Not Human, so no ill-will toward you. But some go savage when war happens. Leave if you want to live.”

Diablo said nothing. He couldn’t decide what to do. Boldboss then appended, *“Storm outside now. Once weather clears, should leave.”*

They really weren’t bad folk. But it would have been so much easier if they were...

†

Boldboss went deeper into the tunnels, leaving the three of them alone. With Rem and Shera badgering him, Diablo relayed the circumstances to them. Having heard the full story, the two had complicated expressions on their faces.

“...So the Kobolds were the beasts they sent us here to dispatch.”

“Oh, no...”

“...I recall Caliture’s troops marching into the forest every so often, to hunt beasts that endanger the races—or so they said, but they might have been attacking the Therianthropes.”

“That’s awful!”

Diablo related to Shera’s outrage.

“...But it’s a fact there are people of the races living in these lands, too,” Rem bemoaned pensively. “They can’t simply vacate Caliture.”

“They can’t?”

“...An Elf living in the blessed forests might not realize this, but... To live, the races need forests they can hunt in, fields they can produce crops from and land abundant with water. Those aren’t things one can prepare easily. It took a century to make Caliture habitable, and it would take another century to make another town like it.”

“Mm, but a century isn’t that long.”

“See, this is why you can’t explain anything to Elves!”

Shera flinched as Rem glared her down. Diablo had to agree that a hundred years was a long time.

“If the races were to leave this place, they would have to go somewhere that’s already inhabited by someone. Telling them to leave Caliture makes no sense.”

“I agree... Still, I’m... I’m opposed to exterminating the Kobolds.”

“We can’t do that, no matter what!”

Diablo was in agreement. The Kobolds had lived in this land first, and they owed them a debt of gratitude.

“...Caliture is a large region.” Rem clenched her fist. “The races’ presence here may have grown, but there’s no need for them to fight over turf with the Kobolds. Not when they’re so few, anyway. It should be possible to broker peace here.”

“You’re right!” Shera nodded assertively. “Just like how the Elves and the Dark Elves get along!”

“...We should stop the Kobolds from recklessly attacking Caliture. And, at the same time, we need to make the Humans realize how terribly they’re treating the Kobolds.”

But that was where the snag was.

“I agree there aren’t that many Kobolds here, but... Is attacking Caliture really that reckless? They’ve already toppled the citadels.”

“...I checked the records before leaving the capital. Four citadels in the Caliture region have fallen, but the estimated causes of defeat are that the spriggan attacked, and they lost their walls or commanders in the fighting.”

“Hm.”

Diablo had defeated the spriggan, and, with this, the Kobolds had lost their primary source of strength.

“...The Kobolds seem to realize this will be a difficult fight for them, too. They probably know they’ll lose.”

“Then they shouldn’t fight, right...?” Shera said, seemingly unconvinced.

“...If nothing else, now’s the time. Given time, Lyferia’s reinforcements will arrive. They’ll rebuild the citadels and, eventually, a subjugation party will be sent into the forest. They’ll be more severe and thorough than ever before.”

“Oh...”

When they had left the capital, Diablo’s party was asked whether they wanted to come along with the army or go ahead. Which meant that, by now, the reinforcements were on their way. But with the road destroyed, they probably wouldn’t arrive that quickly.

“...It’s sad to admit it, but... this is war. The war between the kingdom of Lyferia and the Kobolds has already begun.”

“Then what should we do?”

“...Like I said earlier—first, we need to stop the Kobolds. If they attack Caliture with their current forces, they’ll be wiped out.”

“Is it that bad?”

“Yes. Caliture doesn’t just have an army... Mm?” Rem fell silent.

It was Fennely. As always, she was dressed in an outfit that barely covered her body.

I guess she’s still better than Sylvie...

She had probably just bathed, because she was wiping her wet hair dry with a piece of fabric.

"Hello."

"Hello there, Fennely," Rem greeted her.

She didn't understand what Fennely had said, but did guess at her intent. Fennely smiled back at her.

"Diablo, war, soon start. Dangerous."

"About that... Who decided you're going to war?"

"Decide? Mmm..."

Fennely tilted her head in contemplation.

"...Maybe the Kobolds don't have the concepts of a leader or a chain of command?" Rem asked with a confused expression.

"They don't have a king?" Shera was surprised, too.

"Is Boldboss the most important person here?"

"Ah, yes! Most strong! So, most important!"

They're pretty animalistic when it comes to strength...

Still, they had fought Lyferia for a long time. It only made sense for the strongest person to become the head of the pack.

"Anyhow, I suppose I should persuade Boldboss to stop."

"...Don't do anything excessive, Diablo," Rem warned him.

A male Kobold peeked his head out of one of the holes.

"Fennely, hurry! Ritual, start soon!"

"Ah... Yes..." she said, a shiver noticeably running down her spine.

"Ritual?"

"Yes... Enemy, strong. Warriors, need courage. So, ritual... do. Before battle, ritual."

For raising their fighting spirit?

The Kobolds needed to crush Caliture before the reinforcements from Lyferia arrived. And the faster they attacked, the better.

“Fennely, go now.”

Fennely headed down the hole.

“She looked kinda sad...” Shera whispered.

“If we’re going to convince them to give up on fighting, this pre-war ritual would be the right time.”

†

They’d gotten lost. The Kobolds’ tunnels were more winding and complex than they thought.

We should have had Fennely show us the way.

“...I hear voices from that way.” Rem pointed.

Peering ahead, Diablo indeed found a large group of Kobolds. There were two hundred or so of them gathered in a large hollow, with Diablo looking down on the place from the floor above.

“Oh, there’s Fennely.”

Shera pointed at what looked like a platform at the front of the large space, where Fennely was seated. There were several other young female Kobolds there as well.

“...Doesn’t this feel suspicious, somehow?” Rem narrowed her eyes.

Boldboss was standing in front of the females, apparently making some kind of speech before the other males.

“Let’s win!”

The Kobold males swung their fists in the air.

“Oh!”

“Definitely win!”

“Oh!”

“We are here, to win!”

“Oh!”

“Fighting spirit!”

“Oh!”

“Can’t hear you!”

“Ooooh!”

This isn’t so much of a speech as it is a pep talk.

They were apparently not at all in a mood to discuss things reasonably. Even if he were to explain the pros and cons of his suggestion, Diablo doubted they’d listen to him. When he brokered peace between Greenwood and the Dark Elves, he was able to persuade them with reason. The Elves were intellectual, after all.

But the Kobolds were agitated before the war and were more overflowing with savagery than usual. After a few more cheers, Boldboss said: *“We now do ritual before war!”*

“Ooooh!”

“Some will die in war. But your souls live on in offspring!”

Wait, whaaaat?

Diablo leaned forward. Didn’t he just say something suspicious?

Boldboss then slapped Fennely’s behind loudly.

“Hiyaaah!”

“Good curves! Fine behind to birth strong warrior!”

The male Kobolds cheered loudly.

“Even if we die, our souls eternal...!”

And as he shouted those words, Boldboss reached for her clothes, pulling them off, revealing Fennely’s unclothed figure to the crowd.

“Naaaah~”

It was evident from both her reaction and those around her that this was no accident. This was the ritual, apparently. Fennely was blushing red but

seemingly understood this, making no effort to hide herself.

"I will pour soul first," Boldboss said, undoing his loincloth.

"...Yes."

With an ecstatic expression, Fennely's gaze focused on a single spot.

In the second floor section, Rem and Shera were blushing.

"...What..?!"

"What are they doing?!"

The two couldn't understand what the Kobolds were saying, and what was happening made no sense to them. Even Diablo, who was listening in on the speech, was having trouble keeping up with the situation.

"Apparently, that's the ritual."

"...Impossible!"

"They can't!"

Their opinion made sense, but this was from the perspective of the races' value system. Rejecting the Kobolds' culture wasn't right.

Wait, no, this was a ritual for increasing their fighting spirit. If we're stopping the war, we have to do it before the ritual ends.

"Wait!"

Fennely opened her legs and Diablo nearly fell over the ledge as he leaned in to look.

Whoa, that was dangerous!

He jumped down, but falling flat on his face would have been lame.

"You..." Boldboss glared at him.

"Hmph. I'll be interrupting this."

"Look if want. Fennely get excited by more people looking."

For real?! Wait, no...

"I told you to wait."

“Guest, this important ritual for warriors.”

“You’re all wrong! You’re leaving behind children in case you die in the war? Fools. You should be ashamed of yourselves for coming up with such a foolish plan!”

Boldboss growled audibly at him.

“You call me fool?!”

Convincing them through reason wouldn’t work after all. Diablo took out his staff, the Tonnerre Empereur.

“From what Fennely told me, the strongest among you is the most important person in the group. So if I win...”

“You challenge me!”

Like Diablo thought, reason didn’t work here. The moment Boldboss started letting off bloodlust, he lunged at Diablo.

He’s quick!

His front leg—no, his fist came flying. Had Diablo not been trained by the Swordmaster Sasara, he wouldn’t have even noticed he was being attacked before his head was plucked off. But Diablo blocked the blow at the last moment with his staff. Still, it knocked him some five steps back.

He’s not just quick—his blows have weight to them!

In terms of a skill type, he was similar to a Pantherian grappler. Swift and powerful. The optimal warrior so long as the enemy was within arm’s reach. But right now, there was still a gap between them.

Causing the tunnels to cave in would be bad, and he couldn’t use any wide area attacks because they would hit Fennely and the other Kobolds.

“Try this, then! 《Lightning Bullet》!”

“Haa!”

Boldboss jumped away, avoiding the spell and launching a fist at the same time.

What is this, a fighting game?!

A large jump punch. He then unleashed an attack combo of a medium standing punch into a heavy punch into a finishing move. Boldboss's finisher fired off a ball of light composed of compressed SP, 《Shining Blow》. An attack the Paladin Captain Batutta once used on him.

So he was a level 100-or-over grappler. It wasn't for nothing that he was the chief of a clan that fought against the kingdom of Lyferia despite having such small numbers.

The Kobolds that appeared in-game used weapons, and despite appearing in large numbers, were mooks with low stats. Was Boldboss special, or were the others like him too?

No, I doubt that.

If they had two hundred warriors over level 100, they wouldn't need to rely on a spriggan. They'd beat Lyferia's army even if it charged at them in the tens of thousands.

"You dodge my attack, guest!"

"I should hope you don't start claiming you weren't fighting seriously afterwards!"

Diablo was currently over level 100 as a warrior. Boldboss overwhelmed him when it came to speed, but not to the point where Diablo couldn't block him at all.

"Me always fight at full strength!"

"Do you, now? My apologies, then. I was trying to see if you were an opponent worthy of witnessing my full strength."

"What?!"

"Can you dodge this?!" Diablo unleashed a spell. "《Burst Rain》!"

Shining magic circles spread out in midair, that promptly began spewing out countless fireballs. The spell's charge-up time was slow... But it wasn't an attack one could easily avoid.

"Nngaaah?!"

The Kobolds watching over their fight all raised their voices in shock and took a step back. The women screamed. Diablo did calculate the angle properly so that it wouldn't hit anyone, but...

"Fennely!" Boldboss cried out.

That momentary distraction cost him, as a fireball hit him square on. As he fell to his knees, Diablo turned his staff into the magical sword *Tonnerre Empereur: Libre* and pointed its tip at him.

"You were quite the quick one, but that's not enough to win."

"Grrr... I, lost."

He took his loss fairly. Diablo looked at the female Kobolds.

They're not hurt, are they?

He took care to keep them out of his spells' range, but he was still anxious.

Fennely was frozen in place, her legs still spread open with her hands extended toward her privates.

"Ah... I... What do now...?" she asked with tears in her eyes.

"Get dressed, for goodness' sake!"

Rem and Shera came down from the second floor and covered Fennely with a blanket.

†

Diablo stood on the large hollow's platform. Next to him was Boldboss, now drained of fighting spirit. Rem and Shera escorted the female Kobolds to an adjacent room, given that a massive battle could break out depending on how the talks went.

Ugh... I just had to get on the platform in the heat of the moment...

Diablo hated nothing more than being the center of attention. Thankfully, his would-be audience right now was all male Kobolds. All of them having fox heads curbed the pressure he was feeling. There was something healing to the sight. Like a village of foxes.

"Tell us. Why interrupt ritual?" Boldboss asked.

He thought he had already told him, but apparently Boldboss really wasn't listening back then.

"Attacking Caliture with a force of this size is suicide."

"Can't know how fight goes until try."

"Lyferia has people on their side that can beat a spriggan. Do you still think that way?"

That wasn't technically a lie. He simply didn't tell the Kobolds that he was actually talking about himself.

"What?! There's no way Humans have someone like that...!"

"What makes you so sure? It's only natural to assume whoever came down that road came from Lyferia's capital."

"Uuuu..."

And I guess the Order of Palace Knights might have some people that could beat a spriggan.

He'd heard they'd hunted a huge-class Thunder Dragon once before. They were definitely a party of people over level 100, though Diablo didn't know if they'd show up in the southern frontier.

"I will not mince words. If you attack, it will be tantamount to recklessly rushing to your deaths. Desist."

"You try help us?"

"Wrong! I am a Demon Lord! Be it the races or the Therianthropes, I save no one. But I happen to feel charitable. I will meet with Caliture's governor and have him acknowledge your residence on these lands."

"What?!"

Not just Boldboss, but the rest of the Kobolds all reacted with shocked uproar.

"Humans acknowledge us?!" "No need for fight?!" "Really, Demon Lord?!"

"Hmph... What say you? Will you have faith in a Demon Lord?"

The Kobold males quieted down, awaiting Boldboss's response. His brows

were furrowed seriously.

“Why Demon Lord do so much for us?”

I owe you for a bed and breakfast...

But that wouldn't be Demon Lord-ly. Instead, Diablo laughed indomitably and flapped his cloak.

“For I am simply too powerful! The conflicts of the weak are trifling noise to me. So I will do away with it as I might brush off a fly buzzing in my ears! Or do you intend to challenge a Demon Lord at his full strength? I would blast your tunnels to bits!”

Boldboss sank into thought, but he wasn't one for thinking to begin with.

“Fine!” He shook his head wildly. *“We obey who strong. Will let you handle!”*

Phew... Diablo sighed in relief internally.

It seems he'd successfully stopped the Kobolds.

He headed for the room the females were taken to.

“It's decided.”

He peeked in without knocking, since there was no door...

“No!”

...when he was suddenly urged out of the room by Shera's voice. Looking ahead, he saw Rem and Shera, blushing profusely with their faces red.

“...You can't come in, Diablo.”

“Wh-What?”

The two stood in his way, hiding the room from his view, but he could see Fennely behind them. Her face was blushed and she was panting heavily.

“Haa... Haa... Nnn... Ooh... I... don't think can... restrain...”

“Stay calm, Fennely! Keep your wits about you!”

“I don't really get what's going on, but you can't, okay?!”

They couldn't understand each other, but Rem and Shera were trying to calm

Fennely down.

Wait, did I just walk in on something crazy?!

The other females were similarly blushed, while others seemed a bit more collected. In other words, those that were caught up in the ritual's atmosphere were actually...

In he●t?! They're in he●t?!

Diablo broke into a cold sweat.

“Th-They must have gotten a cold! Since they're not dressed properly! You foolish little things! Wrap yourselves up in warm blankets, drink something hot and rest! The Demon Lord allows it!”

“Nnn...” Fennely twisted her body. *“It... itch down here...”*

“Yes, a cold!”

“You should rest, Fennely!”

Rem and Shera bobbed their blushed faces up and down in fervent nods.

So this is Therianthrope culture... Diablo pondered as he swiftly left the room.

Chapter 3: Going to Caliture

The next day, with Fennely recovered from her estru... or rather, her *cold*, she guided them out of the Kobolds' forest. The storm had cleared and it was sunny out. The season was cold enough for the tips of the northern mountains to be covered with snow, but the region was kept warm by the winds of the southern seas, making it pleasant enough. Deploying her summon beast, Turkey Shot, to the skies, Shera confirmed a mountain that served as their landmark and pointed ahead.

"They said to head behind the white-headed twin mountains toward the noon sun, so it should be this way."

"...It's one o'clock, it's already moved a bit west."

"Do you have a watch?"

"...I don't need a watch to have an estimate grasp of what time it is. Though I can't tell exactly how many minutes past it is."

"Wow, Rem! Your stomach's really good at telling the time!"

"...My stomach has nothing to do with this."

"We just have to keep walking for half a day in this direction, right?! There's also the marks on the trees here and there."

Shera briskly walked across the forest. She was an Elf, despite appearances, and was used to walking through forests.

"...It would take the Therianthropes less than half a day to get back out to the road," Rem said with a frown.

"Think we'll reach there during the afternoon?"

"...They can outrun a deer, so it'd be impossible for us to move at their pace... We should be prepared for it to take us a full day."

"Awwwww... I wanna sleep on a bed~" Shera dropped her shoulders in disappointment.

Even this girl, who aspired to be an adventurer and loved traveling, had grown tired of this long journey. Diablo then decided to change the topic, asking a question that had been troubling him for some time now.

“Just what *are* the Therianthropes?”

Cross Reverie had a distinction between the races (the Humans and the demis), Fallen (which included the magical beasts) and the wild beasts. The Kobolds were monsters that fell into the wild beast category. So were beasts divided into animals and Therianthropes?

Rem brought a hand to her mouth.

“Perhaps... it would be best if we discussed the Therianthropes for a bit.”

“Hmm.”

“...To begin with, as you know, Lyferia is a country ruled by Humans. The demis live in it, too, but that’s because they’ve been allowed to do so.”

They were in the minority, but he did spot Elves and Pantherians living there.

“...Lyferia is the strongest country on this continent. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say the continent is ruled by Humans.”

“So it seems.”

“...The demis they acknowledge as part of the races are the Elves, Pantherians, Dwarves, Grasswalkers, and Demons. Among them, the Elves are said to be closest to the gods, and are treated as a bit more special than the others.”

“And the Demons are treated differently for the opposite reason.”

“...Yes. They’re abhorred because it’s said they have the blood of the Fallen running through their veins. But the other races—Pantherians, Dwarves, and Grasswalkers—were once considered Therianthropes.”

“Oh?”

That wasn’t part of *Cross Reverie*’s lore.

“...That was before the kingdom of Lyferia was founded, long ago. But since those three races learned to speak the Humans’ tongue, they were admitted into the races.”

“By the Humans?”

“...Yes, by an ancient king of the Humans. That king made that law, which is why the races are what they are today. Conversely, races that did not learn the common language were treated as beasts.”

In other words, they were judged to be non-Human and have been treated as monsters by the kingdom of Lyferia ever since.

“An oppressive story if I’ve ever heard one.”

“...Rulers are all oppressors to some extent. Not just the Kobolds, but the ogres, dryads, and lamias are widely treated as Therianthropes. Some also count the giants, trolls, and orcs among them too, but it becomes harder to define at that point.”

“Hmm... I see.”

According to this definition, the races were limited to those who could speak Lyferia’s common language. The Fallen and magical beasts turned to particles of light upon death, and the beasts were those who were neither this nor that. There was no method of distinction between regular beasts and Therianthropes.

“...Researchers categorize giants and trolls as Therianthropes because they attack the races on sight. Their biology doesn’t allow us to coexist with them.”

“True enough.”

Giants devoured the races. Or rather, they were a race that fed off of everything that was smaller than them and moved. Trolls and orcs were only male, and took advantage of the races’ females to reproduce, which was understandably not part of the game’s lore.

These examples weren’t things done out of malice, this was simply their nature. Peaceful coexistence with them was difficult.

“...Still, there are many lifeforms out there who look far different from

Humans, like birds, fish, and insects. They have wills of their own, some sort of communication method, and can feel pain... but I think treating them all as the races wouldn't be right."

"If you take that way of thinking far enough, plants are living beings, too... And we can't live without eating anything. There's a difference between eating the races and eating birds and fish, after all."

She nodded.

"This was why the ancient king made his decree. 'Those who cannot speak the tongue of man are beasts.' And in that regard, perhaps it wasn't out of mere oppression. Someone simply had to draw the line somewhere."

Compared to Diablo's old world, this other world had many more races that stood on the border of man and beast. There had been many times so far that his world's values didn't apply in this one.

"...But if everyone could speak to the Therianthropes like you can, perhaps we could draw a different line." Rem looked at Diablo with envy in her eyes.

"Mm? Yes, that could be."

"...If nothing else, I can no longer look at the Kobolds as mere beasts."

"Agreed."

He'd never tried it, but he might even be able to speak to giants. Though, in that case, they'd probably just say, "Gonna bite your head off."

Being able to exchange words didn't necessarily mean you'd always get along.

†

They found their way back to the road just as they were about to give up and discuss where they should camp out. It was already late into the night. The next morning, they set out early, and around dusk, finally reached a town of the races just as the sky was becoming a shade of madder red.

"Finally, a town!" Shera raced ahead, and Diablo admonished her so she wouldn't trip.

Rem, on the other hand, was visibly nervous.

“Caliture...”

Its outer perimeter was covered in high walls, which reminded Diablo of Faltra. There were also a few watchtowers with diagonal roofs.

“If I recall, Caliture has a Fallen-repelling barrier as well, correct?”

“...Yes.”

There shouldn't have been any Fallen in this region, but since this was the largest base in the south, it still had vigilant defenses applied to it. Unlike the Fallen, who act with deliberate intent, magical beasts can appear anywhere, not unlike a natural disaster. A barrier to block their advance was crucial.

As it was sundown, the gates were bustling with farmers who had returned from the fields, traveling merchants, and travelers. Thanks to that, Diablo entered without anyone asking any questions about his horns.

“If you're passing through, do hurry up!” the gatekeeper called out. “We close the gate at sunset!”

Such were the circumstances, it seemed.

“It's even more strict than Faltra here, isn't it?”

“...It wasn't like this before. It's likely because they're in the middle of hostilities.”

“Oh, I see.”

Had Diablo not done anything, this city would have been under attack from the Kobolds right now. It was only natural they'd close down the gates for fear of a night raid.

“Heehee!” Shera grinned. “It's all thanks to you!”

“Mm?”

“I mean, wasn't there going to be a war?”

“Mmm... I suppose.”

When she put it like that, he really did do quite a bit. It wasn't over yet, though. Diablo passed through the gate and looked around the town.

“We have to honor our promise to them, too.”

They’d have to have Caliture’s governor—and depending on how things went, even the king of Lyferia—acknowledge the Kobolds as residents of this land.

“...I’m sure you’ll be able to do it, Diablo.” Rem regarded him with a serious gaze.

No pressure, huh?

“W-Well, where’s the governor’s estate? Do I simply go down the main street?”

The cities in this world all had many times the number of buildings they had in *Cross Reverie*, with the roads being far more winding. And Diablo couldn’t read the signs, either. The game only had the buildings the players absolutely needed, and the number of people passing by was minimal, too, which was understandable, but...

Rem shook her head.

“...The main street on this side of the walls is a dead end leading to the wealthy merchants’ warehouses. The central main street is a shopping district, too. It does have inns, though.”

“Mm?”

“...We’re currently in the northern district of Caliture, and the road leading to the central district, where the governor’s estate is, is through the small road to the side of that big building over there.”

“That’s weird!” Shera smiled.

“...That said, that road gets a lot of people passing through and means going around through the western district. The locals just use the underground path.”

“Underground path?!”

Rem pointed ahead to what looked like a subway station’s entrance. Locals who didn’t carry much on hand were passing through it.

“...It’s a bit hard to notice when you’re not used to the place.”

“It’s not a bit hard to notice! It looks like a dungeon!”

Diablo had to agree with Shera on that point.

“There’s no way around having these passes, though.” Rem shrugged. “Caliture is built over three slopes, and the underground path takes you to the second floor of the central district.”

Why the heck is it so convoluted? What is this, Osaka Station?

“Well, you can leave the getting around to me. We should reach the governor’s estate before it gets too da...”

But just as they were about to get going, a group of six male Pantherians approached them, led by one with a mohawk haircut.

“Hey there, bro. You a slave merchant or somethin’?”

Their gazes fell on the collars around Rem and Shera’s necks.

Been a while since I’ve had to deal with bozos like these guys...

Rem ignored them by turning her back.

“...Don’t spare them any attention. Let’s just go.”

“Hey! Wait up!”

The mohawk Pantherian reached his hand out to grab—surprisingly enough—Shera. He grabbed her roughly by the wrist.

“Ow?!”

“How dare you...!”

Diablo reflexively reached out to push the Pantherian aside, but... *bang!* His palm heel sank squarely into the Pantherian’s chest, sending him hurtling away.

Crap! I put too much force into that!

The mohawk Pantherian was sent flying ten meters across the gate plaza, with the remaining five turning bloodshot, glaring eyes at them.

“Why, you...!” “You did it now!” “We’ll waste you!”

Rem heaved a deep sigh, rubbing her eyes tiredly. They hadn’t been in town for five minutes and they were in trouble already.

But there was no helping what had already been done. Diablo thought this as

Shera hid behind him.

“Heheheh... I am no slave merchant, but a Demon Lord hailing from another world! Come at me if you don’t value your lives!”

Though it seemed there was no daunting them when all the blood went to their heads like this, and the group of Pantherians charged at him, spouting war cries. Their levels seemed relatively high for thugs, with all of them being level 40 or so. They weren’t weak, but that was about it. Diablo was currently over level 100 just as a warrior, exceeding the limit of the races. Even a group of level 40s couldn’t stand a chance against him.

He averted a second punch with a wave of the hand, and stepping forward to knock his opponent off balance, socked him straight in the face with a jab. Pulling back his arm, he nailed the third Pantherian with an elbow to the jaw, and then wheeled around to plant a kick in the stomach of the fourth one, who tried to sneak up on him from behind.

Compared to the Demon Overlord Modinaram and the Swordmaster Sasara, they looked like they were moving in slow motion. What took the most effort out of him in this fight was refraining from putting too much strength into his blows.

The remaining Pantherian wobbled away fearfully.

“H-He’s strooong...!”

“No, you’re just weak. I’ll spare your lives, so never try messing with visitors again. Or would you have me show you how serious I can be?”

“Eeeep?! I’m sorry!” He screamed and ran off, leaving his friends behind.

“What a bother...” Diablo shrugged.

“Wow! Thank you! I was scared, Diablo!” Shera leaped at him excitedly again.

You do know you could probably beat them on your own, right? You’re a level 80 archer. And you have a full set of gear enchanted by the Demon Lord Krebskulm.

But just as he thought that, Rem tugged hard at his cloak.

“We have to run!”

“Huh?”

And then he saw it—the gate guards were heading their way, having noticed the ruckus. Diablo didn’t think he had done anything wrong, but sticking around for a questioning meant they’d only get going when it would be too late to visit the governor.

Abiding by Rem’s advice, he decided to run. Holding Shera in his arms, he took off into the underground passage. Rushing down the staircase, he found it branched into three roads right off the bat.

“Over here!”

“This is seriously a maze!”

Disappearing into the crowd, Diablo ran down the passageway.

†

Once they made their way out of the underground passage, they were indeed on the second floor of a building. Looking down from the window, they saw the main street on the first floor.

“...That’s the governor’s estate.” Rem pointed at one building that stood like a castle among the short residences.

Influential people have a thing for tall places...

The estate also had a tower with a familiar shape.

“Is that a barrier tower?”

“In Faltra, the two places are separate, but in Caliture, the mage’s guild is integrated into the governor’s estate.”

It seemed the relationship between the two was that close here. They continued through a corridor set up beside a small store and then down the stairway, finally setting foot in the central district... only to be surrounded by unusual people.

All of them were Pantherians, and they were all noticeably well built. Just their poses made it clear they were strong, and there were over twenty of them.

“Tch... Friends of those fools from earlier?”

Diablo reached for his pouch. He didn't want to use magic in the middle of town, but fighting bare-handed against this many people was dangerous.

“...Not you guys,” Rem said with an extremely displeased voice.

The Pantherian leading the group had an unusual head. Most male Pantherians looked essentially Human, except that they had cat ears and tails. But rarely, some Pantherians were born with panther heads, though it was said that, despite their different appearance, they were still normal on the inside.

That panther-faced one was larger than the rest of the group and considerably more bulky than Diablo. He was probably a grappler, judging from his well-trained fists, and a fairly high level one, at that.

Diablo was already in his range, so if he let down his guard for even a moment, the Pantherian could reach out and snap his neck. And so Diablo honed his concentration. The panther-faced one then curled his lips up in a smirk, and lowered his head at once.

“Welcome home, young miss!”

He bowed his head respectfully toward Rem. The others acted the same, bending down to a perpendicular angle to bow before her.

“Welcome home!” “Young miss!” “We've been looking forward to your return!”

The passersby were staring at them curiously. A young boy pointed at the sight, only to be carried off swiftly by his mother. Some shady-looking men turned around and ran in the other direction.

“...See...” Rem stammered, her face flushed red. “This is why I... didn't want to come back here...”

Diablo and Shera exchanged glances.

Young miss?

The panther-faced one then turned to speak to Diablo.

“Did you bring the young miss here, good sir?”

“I assume you know Rem?”

“The assistant instructor wishes to see you. Could you come along with us?”

“What poor soul calls for my presence?”

“...They’re all apprentices of the Gadou clan.” Rem parted her lips bitterly.

“And the assistant instructor is... my aunt.”

“You still have living relatives?!”

Rem hung her head.

“...I’d intended to leave my hometown behind me.”

The panther-faced one shook his feline head in denial.

“Perish the thought. A day hasn’t gone by without the assistant instructor worrying over you, young miss.”

A clapping sound rang out as Shera brought her hands together.

“Right, didn’t you promise to tell me what the Gadou clan was, Rem?!”

Everyone else froze up at this markedly untactful comment. Even if they did have that kind of promise, she shouldn’t have mentioned it now in front of the apprentices.

“Good friend, the Gadou clan refers to those studying the Gadou style of martial arts,” the panther-faced one answered gently. “The instructors are as our parents, our fellow apprentices are as brothers and sisters, and through those relationships, we form a bond stronger than family.”

“Oooh.” Shera nodded with an expression that made it clear she didn’t really get it.

Rem declared flatly,

“They’re pretty much the yakuza.”

Whoa... Diablo found himself mentally backing away.

The sun set below the mountains' ridgelines.

They were in a courtyard in one corner of the central district. The premises were surrounded by a fence so high it reminded Diablo of a prison. A bonfire illuminated the area in the center. They passed through the gate surrounded by a group of men. As they did, half-naked apprentices in the middle of training noticed their approach, rising to greet them with a start.

"Welcome back!"

They're so sultry...

Compared to these people, the Kobolds' presence was calming. Diablo never was too good with jocks... To say nothing of actual yakuza.

"Hmph..."

Diablo stuck to his nonchalant Demon Lord-ly attitude, but inside, he was positively shivering.

"Hiyaaah!"

The one who screamed, however, was Shera. Diablo almost jumped from the surprise, and turned his gaze to see what had happened— Only to be faced with the incomprehensible sight of a woman clinging to Shera's hips, rubbing her fingers over them.

"My, my... What a lovely butt. If I didn't know better, I never would have imagined you'd be an Elf."

When did she creep up on us?!

The only ones around them right now were the men, but this woman slipped through the encirclement and sneaked up on Shera in the span of a single moment.

What is this, super speed?! Instant Transmission?! It can't be anything that cliché, can it?

The woman had black hair with a pair of black cat ears sitting atop her head: a Pantherian. Except Pantherians typically had orange hair with yellow and black spots, but this woman was a rare example of a black Pantherian.

In other words, she was the same as Rem. The same Rem who currently raised her voice in an angry rebuke.

“Let go of her, Auntie!”

Upon being called “Auntie,” the woman recoiled. Albeit with her right hand still glued to Shera’s buttocks.

“N-No... Remmie, is this your rebellious phase? I can’t believe this. I always thought you were clever, but now you’ve become a little hooligan...”

“I’ve become nothing of the sort. Get your hands off of Shera. Do I have to get mad at you?”

“Only if you call me ‘Big Sis Solami.’”

Diablo had finally gotten a handle on his bearings. This woman appeared seemingly out of nowhere, but he had to defend the girls!

“Unhand Shera this instant!”

He reached out to this woman called Solami (apparently Rem’s aunt), intending to slap her arm away. That said, Diablo still wasn’t used to touching women. He only reached out, not actually touching her.

Solami giggled.

“My. Quite the good intuition you’ve got.”

“What?!”

Electricity crackled around her body, dispersing into the air.

《*Lightning Cloak*》!?

A martial art that converted SP into a layer of electricity that covered the user’s body that dealt damage to anyone who touched them. However, its active time was short. That martial art wasn’t all that unusual in and of itself... Except Solami had been groping Shera’s behind since the moment she appeared, and Shera hadn’t taken any damage.

So she used Lightning Cloak on every part of her body except for her right arm? Is that even possible?!

There was no doubting she was skilled on a level Diablo couldn't immediately comprehend.

"Heheheh..." Solami eyed him kindly. "Shouldn't you save her, friend?"

"Aaaahiiii..." Shera twisted and writhed her body with tears in her eyes.

It looked like Shera only had her hips fondled, but apparently something was preventing her from moving away.

Is there some kind of martial art that prevents the target from moving?

"Hmph..." Diablo did his best to hide his agitation. "Those are some odd skills you employ. I understand that you are Rem's aunt and the assistant instructor here."

"Hey, now. You mustn't call an older woman 'aunt' or anything like that. Call me 'Big Sis Solami.'"

She spoke with the kind, calm tone of a sweet older sister. Except... No, there was no such sister. It was just an illusion of what an older sister would be like. Yet, still, there was no doubting how skilled she was.

The people surrounding Diablo's group had all taken their distance. In other words, this was no accident, but a premeditated incident. Diablo had no idea what their objective here was, though.

No... A single thought surfaced in his mind.

Did I just walk into a yakuza family's stronghold after putting an Enslavement Collar on their daughter?!

Diablo was sweating bullets of cold sweat. Rem probably didn't quite realize it, but this was one hell of a mess they had just walked into!

Aaaah... W-Wait, calm down! You have your Demon Lord role play for times like these.

Right now, I'm Diablo.

I am Diablo.

The Demon Lord, Diablo!

"Heh... Heheheh... Interesting tricks, Solami."

"My, my." She giggled. "Now that's a good look in your eyes."

"It matters not who you are nor what you aim to achieve, but she belongs to me! Know that, should you harm a hair upon her head, your life is forfeit!"

"She belongs to you? My, I didn't know."

Shera's body then folded, and she squeezed out a faint voice with tears in her eyes.

"D-Diablooooo..."

"I'll reclaim you now, Shera! Lightning Bullet!"

"Elemental magic?!" Solami's eyes widened in shock.

Indeed, it was rare to see it used in this world. A magic circle formed from the tip of his staff, firing off balls of light. Lightning Bullet was a spell that charged swiftly and packed significant firepower.

"Yah!" Solami stuck out her left hand, her fingertips deflecting the balls of light.

"What?!" Diablo raised his voice despite himself.

He was a warrior of over level 100, and could tell this was a martial art that used SP.

She concentrated her SP in her fingertips...?

"Heheh." Solami swung her left hand. "Made them a bit numb, I'll admit."

As Diablo and Solami faced off, Rem stormed in from the side.

"Solami, that's *enough!*"

"Nn..."

Rem fired off a kick. The woman was capable of deflecting a Lightning Bullet,

so there was no way a physical attack would hurt her. Or so Diablo thought. But surprisingly, Rem's kick shined with SP, too—the same as Solami's fingertips.

Solami blocked the powerful kick with her left hand, and as she did, a *bang!* rang out as sparks sprayed into the air. Solami finally made distance between herself and them, moving back.

“Good work. You pass. ♥” She grinned, making the shape of a circle with both of her hands.

Shera toppled over, as if she'd lost the strength in her feet, and Diablo hurried to catch her.

“Hey! Shera, come to!”

“Aaaahn...”

“Are you all right?!”

“S-So... light...”

“What?”

“M-My body... feels really light...”

What? Diablo and Rem cocked their heads in a puzzled expression.

“My body always felt heavy, like my boobs were pulling me down, but after Solami touched me, I feel as light as a feather!”

Solami chuckled audibly.

“Girls with big busts tend to have their waist muscles cramp up, right? But it feels better after I gave the ol' rub down, right?”

“Yep! It was amazing!” Shera grinned. “It felt so good I couldn't move!”

So that's why you didn't run?!

“...I shouldn't have tried to save you,” Rem spat out spitefully.

“Boo. But, I was happy you tried to save me, Rem!”

“I evidently shouldn't have tried to.”

“Thanksies!”

Solami happily eyed the two as they bickered.

“It’s honestly surprising to see that you made a true, honest friend, Remmie.”

“...Don’t misunderstand things,” Rem retorted with a clicking of the tongue.
“This fat, saggy Elf and I are not friends.”

“Right! We’re companions and comrades!” Shera responded, to which Rem began arguing back.

Solami still had a kind look in her eyes.

“And your skills haven’t dwindled, either.”

“...No...” Rem’s expression contorted at that remark. “I refuse to rely on the Gadou style. Letting the enemy close is too dangerous. I’m a summoner right now.”

“Remmie, you know he wanted you to be his heir.”

“...Regardless of Father’s will... I will not be a grappler. I lack the aptitude for it, anyway.”

Rem walked off inside the building, as if fleeing the scene.

†

It was after nightfall; far too late to visit the governor.

Diablo and his group were in the Gadou clan’s estate. Rem called them the yakuza, but contrary to what that word implied, nothing felt oriental about the place. The structure was built in the same way most buildings in Lyferia were, which could be summed up as a Middle Ages European style—chiefly reminiscent of France and Germany in the 13th century.

Diablo, of course, never lived in those times, and couldn’t discern how historically accurate that assessment was, but this was another world, after all.

Even without comparing it to the palace, the estate’s interior was plain. The walls were covered in yellow-white fabric, and the curtains had simplistic designs. The room felt wide enough for the walls to feel far apart, and it was set with a black, oblong table.

Diablo was seated on a wooden chair that was so heavy it almost felt like it

was made of metal. To his right was Rem, to his left was Shera. And sitting opposite them was Solami.

“Allow me to properly introduce myself. I am Solami Galleu, assistant instructor of the Gadou clan’s martial arts.”

“...Where’s Uncle?”

“Heheh... The instructor was sent to resolve a dispute in the far east. I believe it’s been six months already.”

“...As always.” Rem sighed.

“I haven’t heard much of the Gadou clan,” Diablo said.

If nothing else, it wasn’t featured in *Cross Reverie*.

“We are said to possess a style of martial arts devised many years ago by Fistmaster Gadou.”

“The Fistmaster?”

“Yes. He existed before the Adventurer’s Guild existed in Lyferia, and would accept requests from the kings and nobles.”

“Hmph... So he’s a professional rival of the adventurers.”

“Yes, that’s what it would imply, but fistmasters have a good relationship with the adventurers. I myself often have tea with Caliture’s Adventurer’s Guild’s guildmaster.”

Fistmasters, huh?

It was likely left out of *Cross Reverie*, but it sounded like the grappler equivalent of the swordmaster. Some players had raised demands for something of the sort. And still, Diablo didn’t know why the Gadou clan was left out of the game. Was it because the players would object to an organization led exclusively by Pantherian grapplers? Diablo couldn’t tell.

“And I am also something of an older sister for Remmie.” Solami smiled widely. “A pleasure to meet you all!”

Her smile was as kind as ever, but that somehow came across as scary.

“...She is no sister of mine.” Rem shrugged. “Rather, she is my father’s

younger sister.”

So, in other words, she was definitely Rem’s aunt.

“In terms of feeling, I’d like to think I’m very much like your sister.” Solami frowned. “You’re a precious little sister to me, Rimmie. You do know that, right?”

It honestly didn’t come across as very believable. While still shivering like a scared kitten on the inside, Diablo asked, “Why did you call Rem over to test our skills, then, if she’s such a precious little sister to you?”

“Heheh... You call that testing your skills? That was a greeting.”

“After you used martial arts on us?”

“No one was hurt, though.”

“I actually feel better than before!” Shera pumped her fists.

“...That’s just what Solami is like,” Rem said coldly. “It probably was her idea of a greeting. Though there is a good chance you wouldn’t have gotten away unscathed if you lacked skill.”

“But Rem, Solami is really nice,” Shera said with a curious expression. “Why did you leave your hometown?”

True enough, putting aside questions of common sense (or lack thereof), there was no doubting Solami cherished Rem. Shera’s question was justified. Shera herself loved her homeland in the forest, but had to run away from her home due to her brother, Keera’s, disgusting pursuits.

“That’s one question I’d love to hear the answer to as well.” Solami leaned forward. “Why did you leave without a word when we all care so much about you?”

It seemed Rem’s departure from the nest wasn’t a peaceful affair.

“...I’ve decided to become a summoner instead of a grappler.” Rem hung her head. “That’s all there is to it.”

“But why not be a grappler?! Punching your enemy’s face into a pulp is so satisfying!”

“That’s not the issue here,” Rem cut her off. “We never told you, Solami, but both Mother and I had a very important secret. My leaving home is related to that.”

“A secret?”

Rem’s secret. In other words, the fact that she had had the Demon Lord Krebskulm sealed inside her body. When Rem first revealed the secret to Diablo, her eyes were full of tears, but now her expression was clear and calm.

“...But, thanks to Diablo, I’ve resolved that problem. Perhaps not entirely, but I don’t need to agonize over it all on my own. One day, when I have children of my own, I will not have to be burdened with sadness.”

“Resolved...?!” Solami stared at Diablo with wide eyes.

I guess this aunt of hers already knew about the secret to some extent.

They’d lived together for a long time and seemed to be friendly enough with each other. It was hard to say just how much she knew, though.

“...It is something of a long story, but I will tell you later, Solami.”

“Understood, Rimmie. I’ll listen to you for a thousand-and-one nights if that’s what it takes.”

“...It’s not that long of a story.”

The door opened, and a Pantherian man in a black apron walked in. He was apparently in charge of serving meals, and brought in some tea. It had a refreshing aroma, fitting for a warm land.

†

Solami formed a bridge with her fingers and rested her chin atop it. The atmosphere in the room grew thicker.

“So, may I ask a few questions, then? Could you explain what the collars around Rimmie’s and Shera’s necks mean?”

Diablo swallowed nervously. It felt like, depending on the answer, Diablo’s life might be at risk.

“W-Well, you see...”

Struggling with how to answer, he tried to repress his voice from rattling. Rem cut in and explained instead.

“...I failed my summoning magic, and the Enslavement Collar meant for my summon beast latched onto me instead. Removing it would require a great effort, so we’re putting it off for the moment.”

A concise explanation. Perhaps she’d thought of how to explain things ahead of time.

“I told you magic was trouble, didn’t I?” Solami contorted her face into a grimace. “Your muscles don’t betray you.”

“...There are no problems with summoning magic in and of itself. I was simply inexperienced.”

“I do think that, if you’d have stayed here and trained, you’d have become stronger than I am by now.”

“Is Rem that strong?!” Shera exclaimed.

“She was amazing, I’ll have you know,” Solami said happily, as if bragging about her little sister. “She was level 40 as a grappler even when she was as tall as my knee. She’s more talented than me or my brother, and people lauded her as the second coming of the Fistmaster Gadou.”

“...Being a grappler exposes my body to danger.” Rem shook her head. “I won’t claim that using a summon means I’ll be absolutely safe, but at the time, I couldn’t afford to die, no matter what. So I chose to become a summoner, and I don’t regret it.”

Solami sighed sadly.

“Oh, I see. Then let me ask you one more thing. What about that ring on your finger?”

Rem blushed profusely, her gaze jumping to Diablo.

“Ehehe.” Shera held out her left hand with the same expression on her face.

“...We got married,” Rem said while gazing at Diablo, who felt like he might blush, too.

No, perhaps he actually did go red. His cheeks did feel hot.

“My, my, my! Are those wedding rings?!” Solami exclaimed with round eyes.
“Remmie, you got married to someone from another race!”

“...Yes.” Rem nodded.

“That’s right!” Shera caressed her ring lovingly.

Solami looked at both of their rings before exclaiming,

“And you married a girl, at that!”

A silence fell over the room.

Shera blinked repeatedly, apparently not understanding the meaning of what she had just heard. Rem, however, turned her neck in Diablo’s direction with the creaking sound of a rusty machine.

“...What is the meaning of this?”

Dammit, they found out!

Should he push through with his Demon Lord role play? No, that would be too dishonest. But, wouldn’t glossing over things here be what they call a “white lie”? No, that would be an excuse. Honesty was probably the way to go... And, at the end of his conflict, Diablo only managed a vague answer.

“Ah, well, that is...”

“...Is what she said true?”

Rem realized everything, and was letting out a red, menacing aura.

“My!” Solami leaned forward. “You’ve been working on your 《Outglow》, after all!”

Outglow?

Diablo was curious, but now wasn’t the time to pursue that line of questioning. Rem rose from her chair and began walking out of the room wordlessly.

“W-Wait, Rem!” Diablo rose to his feet.

“...I’m going to clear my head for a bit. We can talk later.”

Rem was scarier with her back turned right now than she was when he had fought the Demon Overlord Modinaram.

The door slammed behind her with a *bang!*

“Rem’s kinda scary right now...” Shera’s ears jerked.

“She is a hopeless one.” Diablo sighed, knowing full well that the only useless person in the room was him.

His plan to exchange the wedding rings before they found out had failed spectacularly. Besides, they only took off the rings while sleeping and bathing, so it was impossible to begin with.

“My, my...” Solami placed a hand on her cheek with a bothered expression. “Did Rem and Shera actually marry you, young Diablo?”

You didn’t babble about it because you knew, did you? Wait, “young?”

That woman was breaking his Demon Lord-ly dignity into figurative dust.

Diablo crossed his arms with a “hmph,” leaning against the chair’s backrest.

“That’s how it was, yes.”

“Ah!” Shera finally realized, after a significant delay. “This ring is paired with the one on Rem?!”

“W-Well,” Diablo averted his gaze. “I’m a Demon Lord from another world, so perhaps I might possibly be a bit ignorant of this world’s customs.”

The lamest of lame excuses.

“Ahaha...” Shera laughed lightly. “I see. I guess you’d need a ring, too.”

She forgave me?!

Diablo found himself looking up at Shera.

Maybe she’s actually really amazing?

“Yes, you’re a good girl, you are,” Solami said through narrowed eyes.

Diablo couldn’t help but feel like he’d been somewhat saved.

The room’s door opened, and dishes full of food were carried in. There was meat, and meat, and more meat... They served ham, sausages, fried meat, and

raw meat. Solami asked the Pantherian apprentices to take some over to Rem, too, so they carried off portions of the food to her.

“Yaaay!” Shera exclaimed with glittering eyes. “Races’ food! I haven’t eaten anything that’s been cooked in, like, forever!”

Diablo almost choked. Currently, this town was at war with the Kobolds, so they had to keep quiet the fact that they were in a Therianthrope village until yesterday. Coughing dryly so as to dodge the issue, he reached for the meat. And, surprisingly enough, it was raw meat—not a piece had been cooked.

Most meat in the market was dried jerky, but this was red, faintly warm, dripping fresh meat. This world didn’t have refrigerators, so it didn’t come off as any surprise that the food wasn’t cold, but meat rotted quickly if kept at room temperature. In other words, this was freshly hunted, newly served flesh.

In Diablo’s old world, the existence of refrigerators allowed for food to be distributed freely, but even there, he didn’t have the chance to eat fresh, unchilled meat. When he bit into it, it filled his mouth with the thick scent of blood. It smelled like animal. And also, a dense, distinctive flavor melted over his tongue.

It wasn’t a flavor he could describe as particularly tasty or bad—but it did fill him with the elation of “eating something that had lived.” With each bite, he was filled with vigor. Solami bit into the meat too, smiling in satisfaction.

“This is a woods bear’s liver.”

“Oh... This is the first time I’ve had it.”

Even though he’d defeated countless woods bears in the game.

“Fills you up with vigor, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, that’s certainly how I’d put it.”

“You’ll be ready for action all night long with this~ ♥”

Diablo spat out his meat with a cough.

“Th-That kind of vigor?!”

“Huh?” Shera tilted her head.

Apparently she didn't get it, as she had sausage sprinkled with herbs stuffed into her mouth.

Terrifying. Solami made keeping up his Demon Lord role play a challenge.

†

After their meal, Solami left the room to attend to her duties as an assistant instructor. Shera went to look for Rem.

"I'll handle this, okay?" she said.

He reacted to her in his usual Demon Lord-ly haughtiness, but deep down, he was on hands and knees in gratitude for her willingness to deal with the situation. Talking to an angry woman was an impossible task, even for most normal men. So for Diablo and his crippled social skills, it was the equivalent of challenging a sovereign dragon with a wooden stick.

He still had the wedding rings he had made in Faltra... Would he have a chance to hand those over to Rem?

He wandered the estate alone and walked out to the lawn. It was where he had fought (was greeted by?) Solami. It wasn't so much a lawn as it was a training field. Thick logs were propped up with ropes, likely serving as sandbags for grappling practice. There was also an oblong, 30-steps-long sandbox for training one's legs. There were a few devices set up he didn't know the function of, but there was a rope extended horizontally and some apparatus attached to a pulley.

It's like a sports gym...

The bonfire was put out since there was no one around, with only the moonlight illuminating the darkness. Being here reminded him, "...She did deflect a Lightning Bullet with her bare hands, right?"

Until now, he'd faced opponents that evaded it with sheer speed, like Boldboss did. Others simply tanked the blow with sheer defense. But it was the first time he had a spell outright deflected. There was no such technique in the game.

"She definitely used SP... That was probably some kind of martial art."

Diablo picked up a pebble and threw it into the air. He then focused on his fingertips and deflected it away, crushing it to bits.

No. This is just a normal martial art. It's the same as 《Finger Blade》, using SP to reinforce unarmed attacks. He could raise his level as high as he wanted, but he wouldn't be able to use this to deflect a spell.

“...Does it have to do with that ‘Outglow’ thing she mentioned?”

When Solami saw Rem get mad, she said, “You’ve been working on your Outglow, after all.” That meant the kick Rem delivered earlier didn’t use Outglow, whatever it was.

Recalling what Solami did back then, Diablo focused his SP into his fingers. A normal martial artist would use it to cloak a fist or a weapon and reinforce them. Limiting it to just his fingertips required significant focus.

For comparison, clutching a baseball in one’s hand was simple, but balancing it on a fingertip was a difficult task.

“...Mmm.”

The SP gathered in his fingertips... and dispersed.

Gathered... and dispersed.

Gathered... and dispersed.

After some practice, Diablo grew used to focusing SP on just his fingers. He flicked another pebble and poked it with his fingers. It slipped away for a moment, deflected... before blowing into fragments again.

Diablo hung his head and mumbled to himself.

“Hmm... Maybe it’s not the way I’m concentrating the SP, but the way I’m touching it. Maybe I should do it more softly, like catching an egg... Oh, maybe that’s why she used her fingertips?”

When touching something softly, one’s fingertips were capable of more minute movements compared to the palm of their hand, to say nothing of their clenched fist. The thought of it sent shivers down Diablo’s spine.

“...So that means she... concentrated SP in her fingers the moment I fired the

Lightning Bullet, and moved the magic away gently, like catching an egg? Is that even possible?!”

But as Diablo sunk into thought, a voice spoke from the shadow.

“That’s only about half right.”

Diablo jolted visibly. Solami stepped out from the shadow of the building. Was she watching him the whole time? But having someone sneak up on him didn’t fit his Demon Lord-ly dignity.

“Hmph...” Diablo gave a composed smirk. “So, you finally stepped out. I figured you’d be watching me until I finished here.”

“My, my. You noticed me?”

“Of course. I am a Demon Lord, after all.”

“I guess my hiding skill still needs some work.”

I thought she was a grappler, but Solami’s a seeker, too?

Her black tail wagged left and right cheerfully.

“I do appreciate your ambition, though. The moment you see a new technique, you rush to try it out. And you even did it on your own without asking me. Very promising.”

“Hmph... I am not one to depend on others to grow stronger.”

Diablo was so socially inept, even posting on a message board for help was beyond him. Asking someone he just met for help was impossible. It would hurt him too much if they turned him down. Spending hours mastering a skill on his own was better than risking that pain.

Solami walked up to him slowly. He thought she would stand in front of him, but she came even closer. She wasn’t just within hand’s reach, her bosoms almost touched him. She was curvy, tall, and mature, but still a head shorter than Diablo, not counting her triangular ears.

“Are you nervous?”

“Mm? Spare me the foolishness. I never get nervous, no matter who I face.”

Looking at them up close, her breasts were... pretty big. They stuck out, with a

definite sense of mass to them.

“Are you... interested?” Her red lips parted.

“Ah... No...”

“Oh, you don’t have to hide it. I’ll be real nice and teach you. ♥”

Solami reached out her arm, grabbing hold of Diablo’s right hand, tugging at it and pressing it against her left breast.

Holy yikes, that’s soft!

His right hand sank into that large hill.

Is doing this with Rem’s relative kosher? No way, like hell it is!

Diablo knew this, but at this point, his hand was acting separately from his will, refusing to retreat. His palm suddenly heated up.

“Uuu...” Solami blushed. “Heheh... How is it, young Diablo?”

Like heaven!

But he couldn’t say that. It was too embarrassing.

“No... It’s, erm...”

Keeping up his role playing bordered on the impossible at this point, but speaking naturally would just result in fragmented “aaah”s. His vocabulary was so defunct at the moment that he was at risk of his mask coming off.

“This is my 《Inglow》. Can you tell?” Solami asked, shoving Diablo’s hand against her breast.

“Huh?”

“Adventurers call it SP, but we of the Gadou clan call the gathering of that force within the body the Inglow. Can you feel how it circulates within the body?”

“Aaah, erm...”

He felt nothing of the sort, but that was because his consciousness was fixed on the soft sensation of her breast.

“By training one’s Inglow, you can push your physical abilities beyond their

limits, lighten your wounds and defend against status ailments. Many of the warrior classes' martial arts depend on the Inglow."

"R-Right."

"Cloaking your presence and heightening your perception uses it, too."

"Mmm."

Even that much?! It sounds like magic enchantment.

But right now, Diablo was in no position to think about the Inglow. His mind was focused entirely on her breasts.

"Did I explain it too fast for you to keep up?" Solami tilted her head.

"N-No, that's not... not it. Yes, I understand. Obviously."

Diablo panicked, trying to sense what went on inside Solami's body through his hand, but all he could feel was soft breast.

I can't believe myself! I let my interest in boobs overshadow my ambition?!

Solami then grabbed Diablo's left hand too, and pulled it to her right breast this time.



“Maybe using two hands will make it clear?”

“Ugh... Kuh, aaah...”

It just made things worse! His sinful thoughts just doubled in intensity!

“Now, try to sense my Inflow.”

Diablo moved his hands, but the soft sensation only felt twice as tempting. The only thing he could tell is that both of those breasts felt amazing!

Maybe I don't have any talent as a grappler.

“Y-You make it sound easy...”

“My... I guess it's hard to sense it when you're not used to it. Then let's try a bit harder.”

Solami took a deep breath.

“Haaaa!”

“What?!”

Diablo felt a jolt running through his fingers that sailed through him and blew away the pink mist clouding his mind. At that moment, Diablo could feel the power cruising through her body.

“...It's a swirl,” Diablo whispered.

“That's right!” Solami narrowed her eyes in satisfaction. “Then, how about this...”

Next, she touched Diablo's chest, her fingertips heating up instantly.

“Ugh?!”

It was the same as when she flicked away his Lightning Bullet, with her fingers being concentrated with SP.

“Can you tell? This is my Outflow. You've managed something similar to it.”

“Similar, but different?”

“There are variations to Outflow. Adventurers usually make use of the solid type.”

The sensation of her pressed fingers changed, as if they'd become solid pylons of iron. It felt as if long, sharp metal claws were pushing against his skin. It hurt a bit.

"The solid form is easier for use in combat, but when the opponent uses weapons coated with magical energy, it becomes difficult to overpower them. So instead, you make use of the pliable type."

Solami's fingers suddenly became softer. They felt less like a person's fingers and more elastic, like gum. Diablo then realized with a gasp.

"I see! So you changed your SP's properties to deflect the ball of light!"

"Heheh... That's almost exactly right."

There existed materials that dispersed a blast's shockwave in all directions, and with just a bit of thickness, absorbed most of the impact. Diablo figured it out, but changing her SP in that brief moment to just the right density was a herculean task.

"You've almost got it exactly right, but..." She frowned. "I told you, didn't I? We call it a 《Glow》 in the Gadou clan."

The sensation of her fingertips changed again. This time it was a peculiar stimulus, a ticklish and numbing sort of sensation that made Diablo want to moan.

"Ugh...?"

"Mm. I suppose that's just about strong enough."

"Kuh...?!"

The odd sensation ran through Diablo's spine.

Being able to manipulate SP lets you do this much with just a touch?!

"Remmie..." Solami gazed at him with eyes that looked like they were absorbing his insides. "She hasn't known a man yet, right?"

It was sudden. Diablo found himself taken aback.

Does this really have anything to do with this Glow thing?!

"Wha?! No..."

“You married her and haven’t yet?”

“Th-That’s...”

That was because Diablo was running around on their first night.

“You don’t have any experience, do you?”

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What are you saying?!” he stuttered. “I am a Demon Lord from another world!”

“Fine, then,” Solami said with a dangerous look in her eyes. “I’ll teach you. ♥”

She means the Gadou style of martial arts, right?! Like the Outglow and Inglow!

Diablo had no plans of becoming a grappler, but he was very interested in learning to control the Outglow and Inglow. His Demon Lord’s Ring automatically reflected all manner of magic, which meant he couldn’t buff or enchant himself with magic, but if he could use martial arts to compensate for that...

I’ll get even stronger!

So he had to overcome this challenge to do that...

Solami’s finger slid down from his chest to his stomach. This time they felt even softer than rubber and almost moist. It felt like a tongue was licking him over.

“Ugh...”

“My, oh, my. You like soft stimulations like this...?”

“N-No...”

“You pure little thing. But it’s fine, I’ll take care of everything. You always make such a tough face, young Diablo, so I thought you weren’t to my taste, but when you make these cute faces, my heart just goes pitter patter... My, maybe I shouldn’t be doing this to my niece’s husband... ♥”

And even as she asked herself that, her hands didn’t stop.

Diablo could have fled, but... He thought he realized why Shera didn’t run back then. The stimulation seemed to resonate all the way into the core of his

body and went on without stopping. This must have been what receiving a high-class massage felt like. Bound by shackles of pleasure, Diablo was robbed of his freedom.

“Kuh...”

“Really, you make such sweet faces...” Solami licked her lips.

Her cat ears lay flat and her tail stood erect. Eventually, her fingers found their way to his abdomen.

“Guh!”

“My? My, oh, my, oh, my. This is amazing. Have you been waiting for that long?”

It had actually been on high alert since she touched his chest. And every time it was ready for battle, things always ended without any engagement... But today seemed different.

Solami dragged it out.

“Ugh?! ”

“My, my! This is incredible...”

She wrapped her fingers, launching a preemptive attack.

“Ah...?! ”

He screeched internally. Diablo’s knees buckled, and he felt about ready to fall over. It took him a moment to realize his back hit the log meant for grappling practice. If it weren’t for that, he’d have surely fallen to the ground.

With her eyes positively shining, Solami crouched over him, covering him with both hands. He felt like a small animal being pounced upon by a predator. This intense stimulation made Diablo unconsciously gather SP in his weak spot to defend it.

“I am... a Demon Lord from... another world!”

“Yes, yes you are. This is definitely Demon-Lord-sized. But with this much Outglow, you won’t block my attacks.”

He was cautious of her fingers, but the Gadou clan’s assistant instructor

exceeded his expectations. She was a master in these kinds of engagements. To Diablo's disbelief, she stuffed it into her mouth.

"Mmmh!"

She's using Outglow with her tongue?!

Diablo's mental defenses were like a sheet of paper trying to stop a bullet. The intense stimulus made him arch his back as he nearly went unconscious. Meanwhile, Solami breathed out heavily.

"It feels like I might dislocate my jaw at this rate... You really are Demon-Lord-sized..."

To Diablo's shock, he could still somehow make out what she was saying. Compared to transforming her SP to being as hard as iron or soft like rubber, turning it to sound was probably simple.

"A-Amazing..."

"It's fine. No one's expecting you to withstand this when you're not used to it. If anything, I'm happy. Go ahead, as you like."

"What, in your mouth...?! No..."

"Heheheh... My Outglow is running through my clothes, too, so it's naturally running through my mouth, too... Also, this isn't something I can do to someone who isn't an apprentice, but since you're Rem's husband, that means you're like family."

If you're aware of that, get your mouth off me!

And as that intense stimulation ran through his lower half, she said something just as startling again.

"This is a secret technique, but... If you master it, you can manipulate the Inglow of another as if it was your own by clinging to them like this."

"Gaaaaaah?!"

It felt as if his nerves had been gripped and yanked out. The part of his mind that had been consciously restraining himself was forced to let go, sending Diablo plummeting into unknown territories. It was like his body had been

taken over by someone else.

What had been dammed up was finally released, bursting forth like a broken floodgate.

“Nnnnm?!” Solami’s body shivered. Not even she anticipated this much. The composed smile that had adorned her lips throughout this experience now stiffened with surprise. Her tail twitched and shook. With his brain washed over with waves of pleasure, Diablo jolted involuntarily.

Solami realized she hadn’t been breathing for a moment, opening her mouth to expel its contents and take a deep breath.

“Pheew.”

Diablo was silent.

“Heheheh. That was amazing. You can be confident. You’re certainly a Demon Lord on this front. Nobody could compare to this overwhelming strength. ♥”

...I somehow feel like I just learned the bitter taste of defeat.

At last, his breathing finally returned to normal.

“Haa, haa... I didn’t imagine you could use this Outglow thing to control another person’s body.”

“Did you understand how I did it?”

“Vaguely.”

“My, it seems you still need some more training.” Solami upturned her lips.

“That’s enough! Enough training!” Diablo shook his head flusteredly.

If you do anything more than this, I’ll seriously die!

The logic behind it was simple. She took control of the other person’s Glow and forcibly jolted it into Inglow. It must have been much more difficult to do in practice compared to controlling the Inglow within her own body.

Solami wiped her lips clean and said, “Mmmh... My jaw is tired from how big your ●●●● is. I’ve never had to handle such a problematic ●●●● before.”

“That was training for controlling the Glow, right?! Right?!”

And at the end, she said something that completely spoiled the moment. Solami's cat ears twitched, and her expression took on a guilty, surprised expression.

"Well, I will be leaving then! I still have some assistant instructor duties to attend to!"

She swiftly fixed her clothes and left the estate as if fleeing.

What was that about...?

And as he stood there shocked, another person appeared from the building's shadow.

It was Rem.

"Ah... Diablo."

"O-Oh."

It was the first time he was completely speechless despite sticking to his Demon Lord role play. It felt like a puddle could form at his feet at any moment from the cold sweat he had broken into. After the matter with the Dark Elf Rafflesia, Diablo decided he "wouldn't get carried away anymore," but here he was, getting carried away again because of boobs!

Rem sniffed the air.

"...Do I smell something?"

"Huh?!"

"...I'm just being curious. Pantherians are sensitive to smell."

"O-Oh, right! I don't smell anything though! Maybe it's coming from outside the estate?"

Rem simply replied with a "could be" and concluded the matter with that. For a long moment, the two of them simply looked up at the night sky. Rem seemed to have calmed down since earlier. Apparently, Shera did her job well. Diablo thanked her quietly.

"...I'm sorry about earlier. I wasn't acting rationally."

"Huh? Oh, no, that's..."

Diablo knew it was his fault.

“...Come to think of it, you gave me the ring because it was a state of emergency. I put you into so much trouble, and you saved my life and soul on top of that.”

“It’s fine.”

He’d have wanted to say something a bit more tasteful, but what does a Demon Lord say in this situation? The Demon Lords Diablo knew all accepted heroes’ challenges and struck fear into the heart of man. They didn’t get found out after accidentally giving a girl the wrong wedding ring...

But he did show understanding. What should a Demon Lord say when in this situation with this girl? He knew he was the one who should be apologizing here, but his voice simply wouldn’t come out when the moment arrived. It was frustrating.

“...You should have this, Diablo.” Rem slipped the ring from her finger. “It’s proof of your bond with Shera.”

“Y-Yeah...”

Diablo was vexed, but accepted the ring from Rem. She was seemingly composed, but her heart was probably storming on the inside. All he’d been doing was making her angry and sad all the time. But this time was different.

Because I have the new wedding rings I had made for us in Faltra!

Diablo reached for his pouch.

“...Come to think of it, there was no reason for us to get married, was there?” Rem wiped her eyes.

“Huh?!”

“...This is a memento.” Rem showed the gauntlets she was always using. “My father was the former head instructor of the Gadou clan. And he fell in love with my mother at first sight when he found her fleeing because of the Demon Lord’s soul she carried... Which was how I came to be.

“The former head instructor passed away, and his younger brother took the position, with his younger sister Solami taking over as assistant instructor.”

“He must have certainly been strong.”

“Yes, very... But he covered for me, and took a blow from a Fallen wielding a sword of fire and ice... If the Demon Lord’s soul wasn’t sealed in my body, that never would have happened...”

“I see.”

“...I lived my life, thinking of nothing but how to destroy the Demon Lord’s soul. And even though that wish ended up being granted differently than I imagined, you were the one who made it happen, Diablo.”

“Mm.”

“It’s my family’s wish, dating back for generations. What more could I wish for?”

“That’s...”

“...And even without rings, we’re still companions, right?”

“Oh, of course.”

He could do nothing but nod. Diablo wasn’t the type to feel happy about having goodwill directed at him. In Shera’s case, had he let things be, she’d have married another Elf, and he knew she didn’t want to be with that man.

That was why Diablo acted. Snatching a bride away from the altar is a Demon Lord-ly thing to do, and of course, he wasn’t particularly opposed to being married to Shera. He thought he’d be happy about that.

But just the same, he couldn’t help but ask himself, “Is a pillbug like me really worthy of marrying Shera?!” And because of that, Diablo couldn’t speak frankly, even now.

The same held true for Rem. Her body was being controlled by the Demon Overlord, forcing her to attack important people and fight Diablo. She was filled with despair, thinking she deserved to disappear for causing so much trouble. And so Diablo gave her the wedding ring, to prove that it wasn’t so.

“...You forced yourself to do that for me because you’re too kind, Diablo,” Rem said with a stiff smile. “I wasn’t in my right mind at the time, after all.”

“N-No...”

That was one reason for it, but still.

“...It’s fine. One normally wouldn’t harbor romantic feelings for someone of another race to begin with.”

“Really?!”

Maybe it was because he came from another world? Diablo was a Demon, but he was super attracted to Rem, who was a Pantherian, and Shera, an Elf, as well as other women. He thought they were all alluring.

Even what he did just now—wait, no, that was Outglow training!

Maybe what he was feeling toward them wasn’t romantic affection? Thinking things over again, maybe it was just lust? What did romantic feelings even mean?

What kind of feeling was “love,” really...?

“I don’t know.”

“...What’s the matter, Diablo?”

“Forget about me. This is about you! Aren’t you, erm... overthinking this?”

“...I’ve just finally calmed down, that’s all. It’s like I’ve been in a dream for a long time. I’ve burdened you for so long, but could you forgive me?”

“That’s... Yes, of course.”

“...Thank you.” Rem smiled with relief.

Despite his denials, Diablo couldn’t find it in himself to give her the wedding ring.

Chapter 4: Ending a War

The following day, year 165 of the Lyferian calendar, first month, 22nd day—Diablo and his group visited the governor’s estate. In Lyferia, governors also doubled as military commanders, and so Faltra’s and Zircon Tower’s governors, Galford and Laminitus, were both skilled in combat.

Caliture’s governor, however, was a sea lion.

That wasn’t to say he was part of a race that had sea lion features. He was just a really fat, round Human. His large table was stacked with quite the luxurious meal despite it only being breakfast.

“Oh! You’re those adventurers sent from the palace. Well met! Come, come, sit down. It’s almost time for second breakfast.”

“...*Second* breakfast?” Rem tilted her head.

“We’ve already had breakfast,” Shera said, smiling wryly.

The Gadou clan’s breakfasts were lavish in their own right. They served meat, and meat, and more meat... Just looking at it made Diablo and Shera get heartburn, but Rem ate away as if it was natural.

“You don’t need breakfast?” Caliture’s governor looked beside himself with surprise. “Are you feeling under the weather? You should certainly watch for your health. I recommend this herb tea. It does wonders for lack of appetite!”

Rem bowed and moved the conversation along.

“...I am called Rem, an adventurer... I’m a summoner.”

She intentionally left out her last name, Galleu, and stressed that she was a summoner.

“A sorcerer?” The governor cocked his head curiously. “Not a grappler?”

“...Yes.”

He eyed her with surprise. Black-haired Pantherians were likely associated

with the Gadou clan in this town.

“...This is Diablo. You can think of him as a sorcerer.” Rem continued the introductions.

“I see, I see.”

“...And this here is Shera. She’s an arch—”

“Summoner!” Shera cut into Rem’s words, pressing a hand against her sizable bosoms.

Rem shoved her shoulder against her and whispered,

“...You can only summon Turkey Shot. You’re a level 80 archer, and since you studied under the swordmaster, you might be a level 80 warrior, too.”

“Then you’re a grappler. Solami said you have the talent for it.”

“...Unlike you, I haven’t been neglecting my studies as a sorcerer. I may have reached level 80 already.”

“Let’s check at the Adventurer’s Guild! Maybe I’m higher than you already!”

“Impossible.”

As their argument grew louder, Diablo coughed dryly, which silenced the two. Caliture’s governor began his second breakfast, opening his mouth to speak as he stuffed himself full of bacon.

“I’m sure you’ve heard of me from His Majesty, but I am Lieutenant General Hyde Ray Matis.”

First I’ve heard of you.

Diablo and the others looked away dodgingly. They’d been informed of the beasts and the spriggan, but told nothing of Caliture’s governor or the garrison. The king and the minister didn’t really put much importance on the matter.

So, how do I ask him...?

He made a promise to the Kobolds, and Boldboss had put his trust in him. He wanted to keep Fennely safe, too. He needed to have Matis, Caliture’s governor, acknowledge their right to live in the mountain.

As Diablo sank into thought, Rem cut to the point.

“...Governor, may I ask you something?”

“Mm? Do you want some bacon, dear?”

“...No, this isn’t about food. It’s about the Kobolds.”

Letting her handle negotiations would be wise, it seemed. Diablo would either anger or frighten him, so this would be the smoothest way to approach this.

“Kobolds?” Matis stopped moving his fork. “What’s that?”

“...Those would be the Therianthropes.”

“Oh, I see. Well, I care little for how you distinguish those monsters. Caliture mines silver from the northern mountain. Or rather, we want to mine it, but those creatures keep attacking the miners, who can’t go about their work in peace.”

“...Silver? That’s the first we’ve heard of this.”

“I don’t think His Majesty cares much for the matter. All over the country, when monsters attack the races, he has them subjugated.”

The Kobolds haven’t said a word about it, either. They likely didn’t care why the races came to their mountain, and even if they knew, it wouldn’t have changed anything.

“...What if the Kobolds were to promise not to attack the miners anymore?” Rem asked.

“What are you implying?”

“...Will you acknowledge their right to live in the mountain?”

Matis laughed out loud, holding his round belly with both hands.

“I have to say, adventurers from the capital are really something. Even your jokes are top grade. They can’t understand the races’ language. They only howl and bark. What promises can they make?”

That was simply how the races saw the Therianthropes. Rem didn’t back down, though.

“That’s not true. There’s someone who can converse with them.”

“Truly?” Matis said, his face streaked with surprise.

“Yes.”

“Do bring them over, then. I’m sure they’ll make for quite the spectacle.”

“What?!”

“Don’t take it the wrong way. I appreciate philanthropy that extends even to wildlife, but you can’t make a military policy out of that. Some of the people are anxious just living alongside the demis, so can you expect them to trust the Therianthropes? My job is to do away with the monsters getting in the way of the silver mine.”

“...But the Kobolds don’t want to fight you either.”

“Do you hesitate to pull out weeds when you plough a field? Do you pity a deer when you go out to hunt? I agree that life is precious, but not enough so to put the lives of the populace at risk. That’s my obvious duty as governor, no?”

“...I... suppose that’s right.”

His reasoning was sound. As off-putting as his appearance may have been, he was still an official in charge of territory.

“We couldn’t oppose the spriggan with our equipment.” Matis shrugged. “Thanks to that, we lost four citadels, but I hear you folks may be capable of dealing with it. In several days, reinforcements should arrive from the capital. Ten thousand men, accompanied by the Palace Knights. We have other forces prepared—not to worry, by the next time we sortie, we will be able to exterminate the beasts! And since we can win, we’ve no reason to back down. I’m one for clearing out any plate placed before me.”

“...I see.” Rem hung her head in a vexed fashion.

It didn’t work. The governor Matis only saw the Kobolds as “beasts that lay waste to the silver mine.” And indeed, there was no reason to compromise when one was confident they could win without much effort.

Stopping a war doesn’t come that easy, does it? But what do I do? How can I save the Kobolds?

“Diablo...” Shera, who had kept quiet until now, looked to be on the verge of tears.

“Hmph... Leave it all to me.”

But Diablo didn’t have any ideas.

†

It once again started to rain. The weather only cleared up four days later, and early that morning, they were immediately informed of their deployment and ordered to exterminate the beasts. Despite having his objections, Diablo wasn’t in a position to argue.

Leaving Caliture’s garrisoned forces in the city, the governor set out with a few select troops and Diablo’s group. They then spent the night in an inn town.

The next day, they regrouped with the ten thousand men that had arrived from the capital. The forces’ commanders saluted, to which Matis responded in kind.

“Good work.”

Incidentally, no horse could support Matis’s weight, so he was carried around in a carriage that was modified to have very large doors. He rested on a large seat that was more a bed than it was a chair, taking up the space of three people.

A man stepped forward from the formation, wearing a cloak that had a familiar emblem on it.

“You’re not really my type. Oh well, I suppose I should get to work. A pleasure to meet you, governor of Caliture.”

The Order of Palace Knights. And the man was a familiar face, as well. His hair was long, his lips were thick, and his muscular body was clad in crimson armor.

“Gewalt?!” Rem’s eyes widened.

“Oh... We meet again, munchkin.” He winked at Rem.

He was someone they’d fought once, so Shera shrieked as she ran for cover behind Diablo’s back. If he recalled, this was the former paladin who attacked

Lumachina. Diablo blew him away with a 《Cross Blizzard》, but he was persistent, only to attack them again in the Demon Lord's Labyrinth...

Because of him, Horn fell into a waterway, and Diablo lost several precious pieces of EX-rarity equipment to save her. And from what Rem said, he betrayed the church (or rather, the Cardinal Authority) and defected to the Order of Palace Knights.

"Hmph..." Diablo scoffed at him. "I hear you've been skulking about, but now you're that four-eyed macho-man's lackey?"

"Yes, I... I fell in love."

The very definition of too much information.

"Oh, you know each other?" Matis cut into the conversation. "We'll be fighting together going forward, so do get along. I apologize for rushing things after you've come from afar, but His Majesty's deadline for the extermination is fast approaching. In addition, it's currently the rainy season here in the southern frontier, and I'd much prefer to finish this mountain hunt while it's still sunny."

They'd be working on a tight schedule, but apparently they were to set out as soon as they regrouped.

Rem spread out a small map.

"...The town is over here. This is our trail... and this is the mine."

The Kobolds' village was in the mountain where the silver mine was.

"We just need to find the beasts and slay them, right? Do we really need ten thousand men for something that simple?"

"The buggers have a way of appearing when you least expect it." Matis sighed. "We can try to strike at their dens, but kill a few and more of them show up. Nipping them in the bud isn't as simple as it sounds. And," Matis appended grandly, "we mustn't forget the spriggan!"

At those words, Gewalt burst into laughter.

"Heheheh... I don't think you have to worry about that."

“What do you mean?”

“I believe you’ve been informed of how our arrival was delayed because the highway had caved in, yes? Upon closer inspection, we found fragments of the spriggan.”

“Fragments?!”

“Looks like somebody already defeated it.”

Gewalt directed an almost sticky glance at Diablo, who had clicked his tongue internally. Now they’d believe the Kobolds’ forces were even weaker, making the peace talks even harder—and Diablo was the cause of it all.

“Kuh...”

Gewalt walked up to him and whispered:

“Heheh... You’ve become king of Greenwood and enough of a hero that your name has reached the capital, and you’re still trying to hide your achievements? Is that your kink or something? Or maybe... You have other reasons to hide it.”

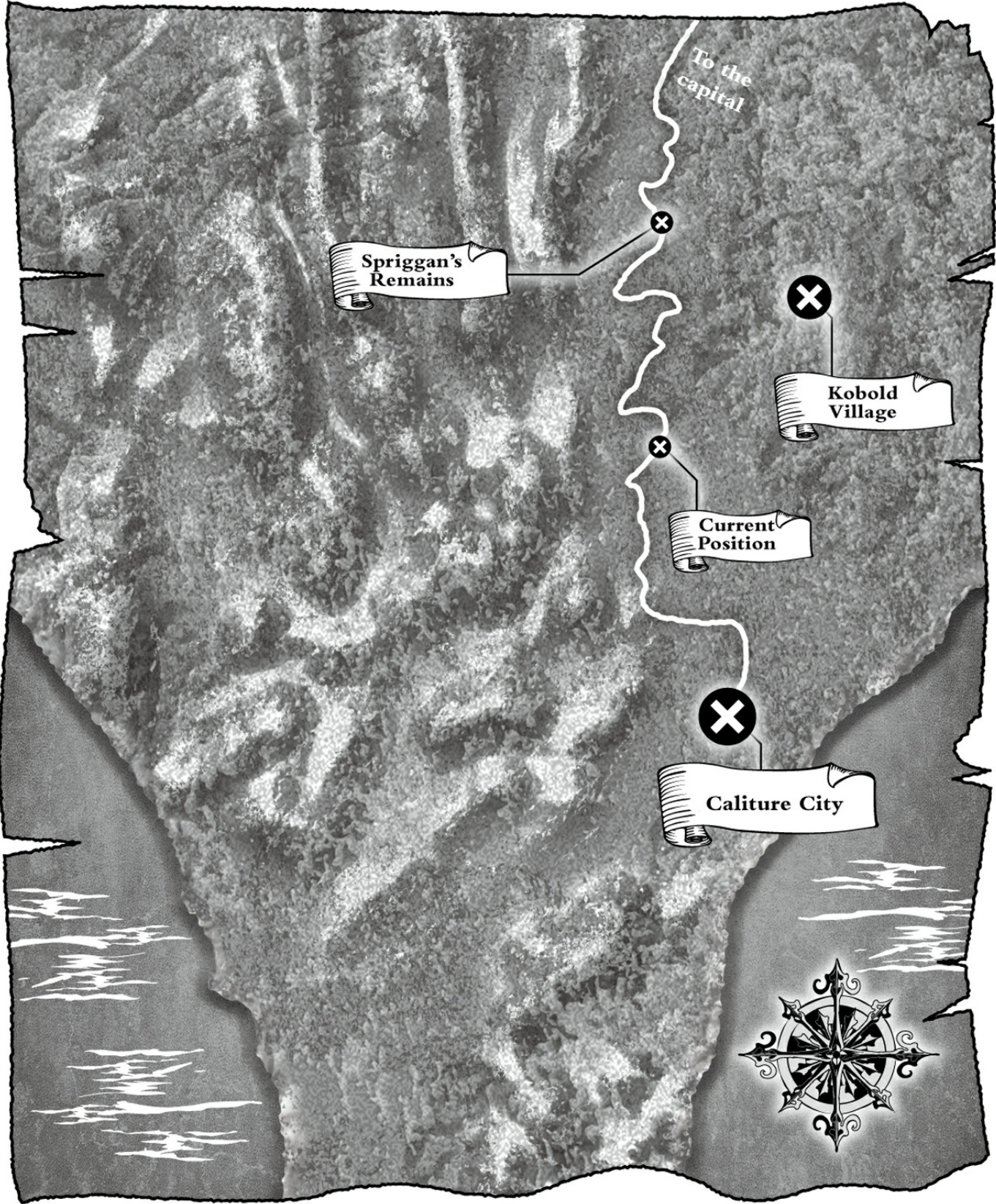
“Don’t stick your nose where it doesn’t belong.” Diablo glared at him. “It will cost you your life.”

“Will it, now? Fine, you do you, then. But I do ask that you stay out of my way. I just want to finish this little errand in the boonies and go back to the capital so Max can compliment me. ♪”

Max was probably his nickname for Maximum Abrams, captain of the Order of Palace Knights. Diablo certainly didn’t want to antagonize him if he could avoid it.

The Area Around Caliture City

How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord



Slightly before sunset, the subjugation party began setting up camp on the mountain's outskirts. Matis was eating even as they marched and held war councils, but the soldiers needed a break to eat, too. Rem opened the map again.

"...If we walk straight for three hours, we should reach the village."

"The mountain's really big!" Shera exclaimed, peeking into the map over Rem's shoulder.

"...It is. Still, it's hard to tell where one can mine silver from. A specialist needs to spend time inspecting the area to find a spot where large-scale mining can take place."

And to do that, the mountain needs to be secure. The Human side's complaints weren't without reason, but...

Diablo was called to the headquarters, which was a large tent. He'd once visited a slave merchant in Faltra, and the tent was reminiscent of that. There was a large pillar in the center of the tent, with a candlestick fixed to it for illumination. Beneath it was Matis, or rather, the rickshaw carrying him. In the forest he rode in a large horse-drawn carriage, which couldn't fit in the tent. It was impossible for him to walk any long distance with his sea-lion-like physique, however, so he was being moved about on a rickshaw, which was moved by the soldiers who served as his guards.

They were currently on leave, and he sat on top of the still rickshaw, chewing on something, as usual.

"Omnom... Good work today. No attack from the beasts yet... But keep your guard up. They often attack during the night."

Gewalt was, as expected, in the headquarters tent.

"Heheh... We're a ways off from the highway, so the beasts' nest could be anywhere."

"See, if they were that easy to find, we wouldn't be struggling this much."

He made it sound like it was someone else's problem. In truth, the soldiers

had the worst of it while the governor was sitting back and eating. Still, the fact that he was actively giving orders was at least better than nothing.

“...Wouldn’t trying for peace be preferable to marching the soldiers for days?” Rem asked again.

“If you can really talk to those animals, give them this message—leave the mountain. I don’t intend to stop this hunt.”

“You can do that?” Gewalt looked at Rem with surprised eyes. “Can you really talk to Therianthropes?”

“...No... Not me.”

“I see.”

They’d completely forgotten Diablo and his group even proposed they make peace with the Kobolds, and they soon changed topics. Rem was likely quite puzzled. She wanted to say that Diablo could speak to them, but saying that wouldn’t change things for the better. The Kobolds would still be treated as monsters and be killed, robbed and driven out, all because they couldn’t speak the Humans’ language.

Diablo thought back to the oni girl, dryad, and lamia he met in the capital. Thinking back, he didn’t really converse with them. The Elf girl at the reception handled all the arrangements. It was possible they didn’t use Lyferia’s common language, either... Not that he had the courage to go back and check.

Matis pointed to the large map spread out on the table, which was covered in food stains from his constant eating.

“We search the east side tomorrow.”

“Don’t tell me you intend to comb through the whole mountain like this,” Gewalt said, his face contorted in displeasure.

“Do you not approve?”

“No, I most certainly do not. I want to go back as soon as possible.”

“But we have to find their den...”

Gewalt gave a thin smirk.

“How about we burn it all to the ground?”

“What?”

“It works, doesn’t it? If they don’t have trees to hide in, the beasts will come out. Though we might just roast them alive to begin with.”

“That’s absurd...”

“Why do you say that? It’s the mine you care about, so the trees burning doesn’t get in the way of getting any silver.”

“There are people hunting and foraging in these woods for a living.”

“Then just give them new work by working in the mine!” Gewalt grinned broadly.

“Mmm...”

“It’s a great idea. Forest fires happen all the time. Come now, governor—do you know how much it would cost to march ten thousand troops for days? You can’t spend that much.”

“That *is* inefficient...”

Matis rubbed his chin pensively with a suspicious glint in his eyes. Rem, however, cut it off by loudly banging her hands on the conference table.

“You can’t! You can’t start a forest fire in your own territory!”

“That’s not what we mean.” Gewalt shrugged. “It’ll just happen to break out. A coincidence. Forest fires are a natural disaster, after all. ♪”

He had a crystal in his hands that shined in a rainbow-colored glow, which Rem regarded with a glare.

“...That’s Efreet!”

It was a powerful, level 130 fire element summon, which could even defeat level 150 monsters if its summoner had the right equipment.

“Don’t tell me you find fault with the governor’s and a palace knight’s intentions? You’re Greenwood’s queen, after all. Wouldn’t want a war to break out between you and Lyferia... right?”

Rem grit her teeth, vexed. There were even tears welling up in her eyes. But then Shera, who had held her tongue until then, spoke up.

“We’ll fight! If you do anything that awful, the Elves will fight the Humans! You shouldn’t fight just because the other side are monsters, it should be to protect everyone! But if you don’t respect other people’s lives... I’ll fight!”

“Shera?!” Rem’s eyes widened. “What are you saying?!”

“Well said.” Diablo took his staff, the Tonnerre Empereur.

“...You too, Diablo?!”

Rem was the most rational of them, and may have been right. No, in all likelihood, she *was* right... But Diablo’s patience was at its limit.

“It’s better to go solo than to team up with scum!” Diablo exclaimed.

Gewalt’s lips contorted upward.

“Don’t tell me you’re fighting for the Kobolds’ sake? Starting a war with Lyferia over this?!”

“That’s right.” Shera nodded.

Diablo stepped forward to defend her.

“I am a Demon Lord from another world! Perhaps this was simply the writ of fate!”

Rem eventually sighed.

“...This is a mess. I thought I was free from the Demon Lord, but here I am, standing at a Demon Lord’s side.”

She took out a crystal and prepared for combat. The tension around them rose.

†

But just as the situation was on the verge of erupting, a soldier ran into the tent.

“Report! I have a re—?!”

The soldier stiffened, unable to understand what was happening. Matis

motioned for him to give his report, still glaring at Diablo.

“Go on.”

“Yessir! The recon team we sent ahead discovered a Kobold village! They’ve engaged them and are asking for reinforcements!”

The situation changed at once.

“Send in the commando unit immediately,” Matis ordered. “All forces are to move at top speed!”

“Yessir!”

The soldier ran out of the tent.

“Keehee!” Gewalt smiled like a devil. “So this is how it ends up going! The strong win! Strength in numbers! And those who are stronger are always victorious! You... do realize that now, right?”

“Not yet!” Rem called out. “It’s not over! Diablo, please stall Gewalt! If the runner only just arrived, I might still make it if I hurry!”

“What do you intend to do, Rem?”

“...I’ll go help the Kobolds. The recon team shouldn’t have that many people. If I go now, I should make it in time!”

They had failed to broker peace for the Kobolds, and now their village had been discovered, but they might still have time to evacuate them. Caliture’s troops weren’t all that powerful, and having leveled up to fight Modinaram, Rem wouldn’t lose against them.

...Something feels off.

But Diablo didn’t have the time to dwell on it. Every second counted. They’d have to defeat the unit engaging the Kobolds before the governor’s reinforcements arrived and had the Kobolds flee their village.

“I’ll come with you!” Shera took out her bow.

“...I’m leaving you behind if you can’t catch up!”

“Of course!”

Rem and Shera ran off.

Diablo fixed the Tonnerre Empereur on Gewalt, keeping him in check. He could tell by facing him: he may have been acting like a summoner, but his level as a warrior was considerable, too. Diablo doubted he'd lose in a one-on-one fight, but he could end up fighting ten thousand soldiers based on what Matis decided to do.

I'd rather keep this as a stalemate if I can. They might be scum, but they're still people.

Diablo wanted to save the Kobolds, but didn't want to have to kill anyone in the process. What mattered now was buying time.

Gewalt's disturbed expression went back to a more serious demeanor.

"So you people really are... in cahoots with the Kobolds."

"See, this is why you can't trust demis." Matis nodded.

"But I do have to thank you. You're going to show us the way to the Kobolds' den, which no one's been able to find until now."

Diablo felt the blood in his body freeze in his veins as he realized.

"You haven't found it yet?!"

"Heheh... My summon, the Secret Grau, is following them. My, they are fast, though. I have to catch up to them before they get out of my effective range."

Diablo didn't know this summon, but apparently it allowed him to keep track of others from a distance. It was seen as a useless class in the game, but in this world, it was the primary type of sorcerer. It had a wide range of applications to match how often it was used.

Still, in terms of sheer firepower, Diablo still had the advantage. Diablo charged magic into his staff.

"You think I'll let you go?"

If he could keep Gewalt occupied, Rem and Shera wouldn't lose to the soldiers. Matis wore an indomitable smirk, however.

"Preparing in advance was worth it, it seems."

Someone walked into the tent.

It was a woman, and one Diablo wouldn't mistake. A Pantherian with black hair, and a cat's ears and tail... Solami.

"Good day, Diablo. Though... I suppose it's evening already?"

"What are you doing here?!"

"I'm working. The Gadou clan receives requests from royalty and nobles."

So she was here at Matis's request. He did say he had other forces prepared, but Diablo didn't expect that to mean the Gadou clan's assistant instructor.

Diablo could feel himself breaking into a cold sweat.

"Do you understand what you're doing? These people are Rem's enemies now. Siding with them puts her life at risk."

"I really do think it's a shame. But I did have a feeling it might come to this... Remmie can be too kind."

Outglow seeped from Solami's body. Her arms hung loosely at her sides as she simply stood still. But still, Diablo felt pressured as if there was a blade fixed against his chest. His body shivered.

"Tch..."

Diablo tensed up. Meanwhile, Solami giggled wryly.

"You won't make the first blow in time if you're this stiff."

"Mm..."

Come to think of it, he was always relaxed whenever someone challenged him in the game. If he was awake, he was playing, so staying tensed up all the time was impossible. Concentration wasn't the same as tension. He had to keep what he had to do in mind, and calmly observe his opponent.

I have to switch my consciousness to back when I was a shut-in gamer.

"That's some wonderful 'serene' Inglow." Solami nodded.

"So you know each other, too?" Gewalt shrugged. "You won't betray us though, will you?"

“Never,” Solami declared flatly. “Those of the Gadou clan would slay their own parents if the mission at hand demanded it. I’d refuse if the task was to harm Remmie or her friends in the first place... But I never thought she’d oppose the kingdom for the sake of some animals.”

“Agreed.” Gewalt smirked cynically. “It is strange, isn’t it? I’ll leave this place to you, then.”

“Yes.”

“Are you... really sure about it? That little pipsqueak, Rem... I’ll probably end up killing her. She’s the type who won’t surrender even if it costs her her life.”

“There isn’t much I can do. She chose her path.”

“I see.”

“But, if you do kill her, do stay out of my sight. I can’t promise I’ll be able to stay calm otherwise.”

“That’s my intention. I mean, you’re just like your pipsqueak of a niece, after all. If you lived a bit more freely, you might become a good woman like me, you know?”

“It’s just in my nature.”

Gewalt left the tent with a wave of the hand.

“Wait!”

The moment Diablo turned his focus to him... Solami was upon him as if she’d teleported to his side.

“Looking away?”

“《Flash Charge》?! ”

It was a martial art the swordmaster used. Diablo didn’t know what level was required to acquire it, but it was likely 150 or above. It was a rushing type of move that moved as fast as teleportation—even faster than a magi gun’s bullet.

“I was only asked to stall you...” Solami said in a cold voice. “But if you’re not careful, I may end up killing you.”

Matis shrugged.

"I couldn't care less. He's a traitor one way or another."

"What do you intend to do, governor? Stand by and watch the whole time?"

"I intended to go all the way to the Kobolds' den, but the soldiers are on their meal break at the moment, and I'm one to think that anyone who gets in the way of a meal is an enemy. I can't do anything that awful to my men."

That was even more forbidden than setting a forest on fire, it seemed.

"Can't trust me, can you?" Solami smiled thinly.

"Oh, perish the thought! I have a great deal of trust in the Gadou clan. I'd bet this lovely piece of jerky on you."

"...I'm so honored."

She then turned back to Diablo, taking her distance from him again, who clicked his tongue for the umpteenth time.

"You pig-headed woman. Will nothing get you to step aside?"

"I love Rennie... But I love my grandfather, father, and brother just the same. I have to make sure the good name of their clan, as well as the honor of the disciples they left in my care, stays safe. So I'll put my all into this battle."

"Ridiculous!"

"Huh?!"

"Are your grandfather, father, brother, or apprentices the type to leave Rem to die?"

"If the request demands it, they would."

"Fools! Even if you take a quest, should you realize it goes against your sense of justice, it is only bravery to know to change where your blade is fixed, even if one risks dishonor for it!"

"And all you have to show for that is treason. Is there any meaning in defending those beasts?"

"All the governor wants is silver."

"That doesn't matter..."

“What is honor worth if it was gained by siding with what you know to be injustice?!”

“...I will not withdraw.”

Solami’s eyes were full of stern will. Diablo turned the Tonnerre Empereur into its blade form, which made his MP consumption skyrocket, but multiplied his attacks by seven in exchange. Solami, meanwhile, steeled her resolve. Diablo, on the other hand, had no such determination. So instead, he chose to become a Demon Lord.

“I understand your resolve. But even that will snap when faced with the might of a Demon Lord!”

†

Solami was the one to make the first move.

“Haaaaaa!”

Pantherians excelled in their agility, and she was a short-range grappler, at that. It was only natural for her to be the one to make the first strike. Diablo knew this and therefore didn’t panic.

He’d already deployed 《Super Mine》—a spell that blows up when stepped on—below his feet. But whether she’d seen his brief movements, she could see the flow of magical energy, or she had simply out-predicted him, she rushed forward, avoiding the spots he’d laid the mines.

“I’d expect no less! However!”

Diablo was a gamer who prided himself on being undefeated in one-on-one battle. He always had a second and third card up his sleeve. He retreated back, and Solami gave pursuit.

You deflected a Lightning Bullet before, but how about this?!

“Eat this! Glacies Cannon!”

This spell fired a glacier like a cannonball, and had enough force to penetrate several layers of castle walls. At this short of a range, it was unavoidable. Seven such projectiles fired off one after another.

But Solami surprisingly elected to defend against it with her bare hands. It should have had enough force to crush her even through her hands, but she withstood the impact using her Outglow.

“Ugh, aaaaaaaaah!”

“All seven of them?!”

He didn’t hold back. Was using a water element spell a bad choice, or was his firepower insufficient even when multiplied sevenfold? He couldn’t break Solami’s defenses, and in exchange for her intercepting his attack, she was within arm’s reach of him now.

“Young Diablo! You don’t have enough killing intent!”

Wasn’t your job just to stall me here?!

“I just haven’t cast aside my capacity for thought, unlike you!”

Solami was the type to think of nothing else when the time came to battle. She simply submerged herself in battle, defeating her opponent with almost mechanical precision.

But right now, Diablo wasn’t that cold. He’d always kept his opponent in the back of his mind. Solami swung her fist, and he moved to avoid it. But to his surprise, it was as if her fist sucked him in, pursuing him.

“《Sure Hit》?! ”

“Too slow!”

He tried to switch to defense halfway through, but he didn’t make it in time. Close combat was like rock-paper-scissors. It was impossible to change to rock once you saw the opponent went with scissors. It was different when there was a major level gap, but Solami was actually faster than he was.

Diablo took a blow to the face and was thrown back.

“Gah...?! ”

She closed the distance on him in an instant.

She used another Flash Charge now?! Is she conserving it for when she has to go in pursuit because she can’t use it in fast succession?!

She landed a kick on him as his stance crumbled. He could hear the sound of something snap as pain ran through his body.

Did she break some of my ribs...?!

He crashed against the tent's pillar, snapping it, and went on to be propelled out of the tent and into the forest. He broke through three trees before finally stopping.

"This has got to be a joke..."

She was absurd. This woman could beat the Demon Overlord in a fistfight. But it was then that a shiver ran down his spine; he could feel a menacing aura approaching him from the crumbled tent. He reflexively unleashed a spell.

"《Tidal Wall》!"

A magic circle appeared in the air, generating a pillar of water. And the next moment...

"《Shimmering Wave》!"

A ball of light pierced through the shapeless tent. That was likely some sort of martial art, an enlarged form of the Shining Blow attack. It clashed with the wall of water, and the two struggled for a long moment. He'd somehow managed to block it...

"Heheheh..." Diablo realized he'd started smirking at some point. "Well played."

Drinking down a healing potion, he rose to his feet. Solami faced him.

"You're unharmed...?! Ah, no... I didn't think there was a potion out there that could heal that much damage in one go."

"What decides a win or a loss is preparation!"

"Then... I guess I just have to beat you until you run out of potions!"

"I'm afraid I haven't the time for that. Playtime is over! Cross Blizzard!"

Fast as she might be, she couldn't dodge an area of effect attack. Countless whirlwinds formed around them, freezing anything they touched and then crushing them through with intense gales of wind.

The other soldiers had panicked and ran away when the tent collapsed, so there was no concern of hurting them. Was Matis still trapped under there, though...?

Since he's a governor and a lieutenant general, he should be equal to Galford. This won't kill him.

And he had attempted to kill him, anyway. Diablo had no reason to be all that concerned for him.

The freezing tempests froze the grass beneath their feet, reducing it to dust. But someone withstood it, standing with her body coated with Outglow.

"Pheeeew..."

"You monster."

Is that 《Rampart》...?

"I'll admit I'm surprised, Young Diablo. I've never seen elemental magic this powerful."

"Hmph... And it's my first time seeing someone stand so composed in the middle of high-level magic. Allow me to apologize."

"For what?"

"I've made a mistake. I've been treating you like a person."

"I don't think there's anything wrong with that assessment."

"No... I should have fought you as a monster on par with a Demon Lord."

"My, oh, my. I just got called a monster."

"I'll tear that composure to bits soon enough."

I need a more powerful spell than Cross Blizzard.

But he couldn't use Gravity Abyss or 《White Nova》. Any attempt to chant for them would end with him being beaten up before the spell even fired off. The air quivered just as Cross Blizzard's effect was wearing off.

Solami suddenly appeared before his eyes.

"Thinking too hard in the middle of battle is a sorcerer's bad habit, young

Diablo.”

“You...?!”

Did she pretend to be withstanding the spell so as to make me unconsciously let down my defenses?!

The next moment, Solami’s hand cut into Diablo’s left breast like a blade. Reinforced by Outglow, she jabbed into him like a spear. She said she’d keep attacking until he ran out of potions, but upon learning he had a means of recovery, she changed her aim to a one-hit kill.

Blood sprayed out.

She’s... really amazing. I’ve really learned a lot from you, assistant instructor.

Diablo protected his left breast with his magical sword, the Tonnerre Empereur: Libre. The silvery blade crumbled, and fired off a spell at the same time. An unchanted, omitted spell—the fastest Lightning Bullet possible!

The flash bounced back against her abdomen.

“Gaaah!”

Blown back, Solami crumbled to the ground. Diablo likewise fell to the ground. It wasn’t an instant kill, but his wound was that deep.

“Ugh... Aaah... I used my sword to block it and circulated all my SP for defense... And that’s all I could manage...?”

He could feel his consciousness blinking out.

No!

But his body wouldn’t move. And when he heard a woman’s voice, he froze up. To his shock, Solami was on her feet.

“It’s not SP, but the Outglow, young Diablo.”

“What...?!”

“You used your sword and Glow to intercept my attack, while firing off a spell at the same time.. A splendid counterattack, even if I did lower my defense when going on the offensive.”

Her abdomen was perfectly unharmed. She was looking ahead expressionlessly.

Is this woman really one of the races?!

Diablo's body was spurred by terror, kicking away all the exhaustion and pain. He lifted a hand that felt as heavy as a rock and jammed his fingers into his pouch, fumbling for a potion.

I have to heal! I'm dead if I don't hurry!

Had a potion tube ever felt this heavy before? And the cork felt like it was glued onto the damn thing. Finally pulling it open, Diablo spilled the green liquid over himself. The potion healed Diablo's wounds in a moment.

"Kaaah!"

Jumping to his feet, his eyes widened in shock. Solami was crumbled on the ground. She wasn't on her feet. On the contrary—she was bleeding profusely from her stomach.

"Was that some kind of delusion...?"

Thinking back on it, it really was unnatural. She took a direct hit from such a spell; it was impossible for her to get away unscathed, much less stand there expressionlessly.

Was it to spur me into action...?

"That's... what I'd expect from the man Rem chose to marry..." she whispered, her gaze still fixed downward.

"Ah, no, that's..."

"You win. Young Diablo... Please, keep her... safe..." Solami's eyes fluttered shut.

Diablo rushed over to her side.

"Stop fooling around! I won't let you shove this onto me! If you want Rem to be kept safe, defend her yourself! Our marriage was annulled anyway, we've remained divorced since that night!"

He spilled a potion over her as he spoke. And with her wounds instantly

healed...

“Wh-Why...?!” Solami looked at him, aghast. “Why did you save me?”

“Rem would be saddened by your death.”

“I’m your enemy! And you only beat me thanks to that clever scheme... That won’t work a second time!”

“Silence! If you want to fight that badly, I’ll face you a second time! But when I win, expect me to do the same thing again!”

“Why are you so... Ah! Forget that, you said you got divorced?! You better explain yourself!”

You were kind of the trigger for it. I’m the overall reason, though.

Honestly, Diablo was the one who wanted an explanation for how things came to this.

“She said I ‘had no reason to marry her.’”

“Huh...?”

“I mean, I am a Demon Lord, after all...”

“The only reason you need to marry someone is because you love them. And Rem loves you.”

“I cannot comprehend what this word, ‘love,’ means.”

Solami tilted her head.

“Putting your life on the line to fight and protect someone is love.”

Diablo pressed his hand against his left breast as he silently contemplated her words... Even though the wound she had inflicted on him had completely healed by now.

Rem ran on, even as she gasped for air and her legs screamed out in pain. Shera—who would usually be the first to complain during journeys—followed after her without uttering a single word.

“Haa, haa, haa! Over here!”

They got out of the dense forest. The darkness was so thick that an untrained Human couldn't have even walked through it, but Rem was an adventurer and a Pantherian. Her night vision proved effective in this situation.

In a clearing, she saw a rope extending from one tree branch to another. The Kobold girl, Fennely, was hanging damp clothes on top of the line.

She's airing out laundry?

Fennely turned around to face her. "Kyu?" She cocked her head quizzically.

Rem then realized a major problem.

We can't understand them without Diablo!

But moroso, they had rushed to the village because they heard the reconnaissance team had found and attacked it, but there was nothing there. Did they beat Caliture's soldiers back already? But there were no marks of a battle. Or maybe there was some other village nearby?

Shera gasped for air, her hands on both her knees.

"Thank goodness, they're still fine...!"

"...No. We... We may have made a huge mistake."

Rem looked around cautiously, when suddenly a buzzing reached her ears. An insect fluttered down. It had a body the size of a twig, with a small Enslavement Collar clasped around it.

"A summon beast?!" Rem went pale.

"Huh? What?" Shera's expression turned quizzical.

Fennely barked some kind of question, but they couldn't understand her. Still, Rem spoke to her severely.

"...Listen to me, Fennely, all right? Have the village's Kobolds run away now? A palace knight found this place."

"Woof?"

"Please understand me. You have to run, now!"

The sound of the undergrowth being stomped on reached their ears.

“Uu?!” Fennely’s expression contorted suspiciously.

“Huh, who’s there?!” Shera took a step back.

“Kuh...” Rem took out a crystal.

The figure of a tall man appeared from the dark forest.

“Heheheh... Thank you for guiding me all the way here, munchkin. ♥”

Shera screamed. Rem stepped forward to hide Fennely and sharpened her nerves. Was there anyone else?

“...Where’s Diablo?”

“Who knows? Probably playing around somewhere.”

“You lie!”

“Of course I’m lying. How dumb do you have to be to ask the enemy for information?”

Rem could only speculate, but there was likely some other strong enemy Diablo couldn’t overlook. She couldn’t imagine Diablo losing, but that didn’t mean he could come immediately. She had to buy time. And if she was going to fight, she would have to make as much noise as possible. If Fennely and the other Kobolds inside noticed it, they’d no doubt run away.

Judging from his fight with Diablo, the Kobold chief, Boldboss, was quite strong, but Rem doubted he could beat Gewalt. But what of the two of them, right now?

“...Shera, listen to me carefully.”

“Y-Yeah?”

“...When we fought him in the Demon Lord’s Labyrinth, we couldn’t do anything.”

“Right. What do we do?”

“...But our levels now are nothing like what they were back then. Think back to what Sasara taught us. And we still have the gear Diablo and Klem gave us.”

“You’re right!”

“...Compared to back then, we’re much stronger.”

“Is your strategy talk over?” Gewalt sneered at them.

“...Come forth, Stoneman!”

A massive statue appeared. Its square head didn’t have a mouth or eyes, but it still glared at Gewalt.

“Let’s do it!” Shera nocked an arrow. “We’ll protect everyone, by ourselves!”

“My, going with the frontal attack? You think you can beat me like that?”

Rem hesitated. Should they launch the first move? They were the ones trying to buy time, after all. They stared each other down, but then Gewalt suddenly smiled wryly.

“Heheh... Thank you for giving me the time. I finally caught my breath.”

“Ah...!”

He had to chase Rem down, and even a palace knight like him had to go at full speed. In terms of race, Humans weren’t as adept at running through the forest as the Pantherians and Elves. Plus, he was clad in armor and had to use a summon beast to keep track of them. They should have attacked him while he was fatigued.

“Looks like you’re still as inexperienced in fighting other people as ever.”

“...Kuh! Go forth, Stoneman!”

“Couldn’t you contract something a bit stronger? Acting skimpy will only buy you an early grave!”

“Take a 《Rain Shot》!” Shera fired an arrow toward the sky.

The arrow vanished, and after a pause, countless arrows made of SP rained down on their target. However, Gewalt smoothly evaded the hail of arrows with brisk steps.

“At least examine your enemy before you pick your martial art. You can fire as many as you want, but an attack this slow will never hit me.”

He took out a rainbow-colored crystal—one for summoning exceptionally powerful summon beasts.

“Time to make your debut—Fafnir!”

“Ah?!” Rem froze up in shock.

Even Shera had heard the name. Fafnir was said to be the strongest dark element summon beast! A swirl of magical energy erupted in the air, and from within it slithered out a pitch-dark snake. It was somewhere from 100 to 200 steps long, and had a pair of long, narrow wings even longer than its torso. It was a malevolently-shaped winged serpent.

Its scales were a black that gleamed with a purple luster, and black smoke billowed from its massive jaws. It roared at them with an ear-piercing screech.

“Bwaf?!” Fennely jumped up in terror and dove into the hole leading down into her village. In the end, they somehow managed to alert the Kobolds, and now they’d know their village was discovered.

“Oh, I see... They were living in those holes.” Gewalt shrugged. “My, no wonder no one could find them.”

“We won’t let you chase them down!” Shera fired another arrow.

Gewalt drew his sword from its sheath, cutting the arrow down.

“Doesn’t look like you leveled up at all.” He clicked his tongue. “I stocked up on all these powerful summons in case I ran into another black dragon!”

“...Kuh.”

Rem knew he was strong. They had trained under the swordmaster and gained better gear, but it wasn’t nearly enough. Gewalt had been on the verge of dying to a Large Black Dragon, and would have perished if it weren’t for Lumachina’s miracle. But even then, he always kept the idea of a rematch in mind, making preparations to win.

He was all too different from them.

But as Rem shivered, Shera stood at her side, drawing her bow to its limits.

“We did not slack off! Aaaaaaah! 《Wave Shot》!”

Her arrow turned into a bullet of light that impacted Fafnir's jaw. It threw its head back dramatically, letting out a screech that felt like it could shake the mountains. Its scales cracked and blood splattered into the air.

"Aaah, it didn't pierce him..." Shera moaned in disappointment.

True, it dealt damage, but the arrow failed to pierce the creature.

"Oooh..." Gewalt's eyes widened. "That wasn't bad at all. You actually pulled off a Wave Shot. That's supposed to be a level 90 martial art."

"Ehehe..."

"As a prize, I'll start by killing you first. ♪"

Gewalt snapped his fingers and Fafnir beat its massive wings. It parted its titanic jaws so wide it almost looked like its body was split in two, and it charged forward.

"Aaaaah!"

Her attacks were powerful, but Shera was exceptionally weak when it came to being attacked herself.

"Dodge!"

Rem used Stoneman to push Shera away.

"Gaah?!"

The next moment, Fafnir swooped across where Shera had just been standing, shaving off part of Stoneman in her place. Its upper half was completely gone, and it was reduced to a black crystal that flew back to Rem's hand.

"Kuh..."

"Ah, thanks, Rem!"

"...Thank me later. Keep attacking him, and leave defense to me!"

"Right, I'll do my best! Here's a 《Lightning Shoot》!"

Shera fired an arrow that became coated in light and struck Fafnir with extraordinary speed. It recoiled again—Shera's attacks were dealing damage.

Rem's tactics were true to the basics: the summon beasts took the front, prioritizing defense and distracting the enemy while she left the damage dealing to Shera, the archer.

"Come forth, Iron Gorilla and Iron Golem! And also Rockpup, Dragonfly, and Saber Tiger!"

She was focusing all she had on Fafnir. The enemy was a powerful, single target. It had wings, but it was incapable of flight. This was large, so her attacks hit, but... Despite everything, summons of these levels couldn't deal any noticeable damage to something like Fafnir. Still, the serpent couldn't ignore them.

And sure enough, Fafnir turned its sights on her summons. Iron Gorilla, Iron Golem, Rockpup, and Dragonfly were crushed one after another. Saber Tiger was agile enough to dodge and lasted a bit longer, but in the end, it was defeated as well.

But as they fought, Shera fired off powerful martial arts that managed to deal some decent damage. Combat was going smoothly—they were buying the time they needed, and at the rate they were going, they might even be able to defeat Fafnir. Rem was gradually running out of beasts to summon, but... it was more so a matter of if she ran out of summons before the enemy's HP was depleted.

"You're doing better than last time, girls." Gewalt nodded. "I thought just Fafnir would be enough to deal with you, but you're doing surprisingly well. Letting those animals run away would be an issue, though... It might be time to take things a bit more seriously."

He took an MP potion out of his pocket and gulped it down before pulling out another rainbow crystal.

"Burn those beasts to death, my fiend of flames! Efreet!"

A summon beast clad in flames appeared. It was like lava took human form, and its size was a match for the spriggan they met not too long before. The heat emanating from Efreet lit the surrounding trees on fire.

Rem took out a summon crystal she had kept aside.

“Come, Asulau!”

It was large, stout, and hard-hitting. In the end, she believed this kind of summon was strong.

“Heheheh...” Gewalt’s face contorted. “Once I cook you two alive, I’ll use its 《Incandescence》 skill to turn everyone in those holes into fox roast! Or maybe Fafnir’s 《Poison Breath》 will do better instead? I simply can’t choose!”

“Shera, shoot! A concentrated attack!”

“All right! Sure Hit and Lightning Shoot!”

She fired an arrow while activating a martial art that guaranteed perfect accuracy. But the target wasn’t the summon this time, it was the sorcerer! They’d aimed only at Fafnir thus far, but that was only to lull their true opponent into a sense of security. Gewalt was a skilled warrior, so he didn’t use his summons as a shield, instead either evading or tanking attacks launched at him.

Shera’s concentrated attack linked with Rem’s most trusted summon, and Rem herself joined in on the attack.

“Aaaaaaaah!”

The enemy didn’t dodge. All the attacks connected, and Rem definitely felt that she had hit. Her fist had smashed into his face!

Did we finish him?!

Blood spurted out—but it was Fafnir who was wounded! It screeched, its massive body thrashing about.

“If you two call yourselves summoners, at least do it after learning how to use 《Back Passing》.”

“...What?! ”

“You can use it at level 100 and above. It’s a spell that lets you transfer any damage you receive to your summon beast instead.”

“You can do that...?! ”

If he’s unharmed, we can’t stay this close to him!

Realizing this, Rem made to hop back, but a warmth spread across her stomach. She crumpled to the ground.

“...Gaah?! Kaaah?!”

Gewalt had slashed her across the abdomen and blood was gushing out.

See... This is why getting close to the enemy is a bad idea...

At the very end, she relied on her fists. She just couldn't match him in her knowledge as a sorcerer. She could hear a girl scream through her fading consciousness.

Shera?!

Fafnir's tail knocked her away as it rampaged. Shera's body smacked against a tree and fell limply to the ground.

“Shera!”

†

“Have a biscuit!”

Rem came to with a start, and looked around hurriedly. She was in one of Faltra's bakeries called Petre's—albeit now it was more of a Fallen café. The time was noon.

“...Huh? Wasn't it nighttime, and wasn't I fighting a palace knight in the forest?”

“What's wrong, Rem?”

In front of her was a table, and on it was a plate with a heap of biscuits on it. Klem held one out toward Rem.

“Go on, eat it.”

“...Thank you.”

Rem accepted the biscuit, examining the pastry. Klem was happily stuffing her cheeks with biscuits.

“Tasty! This is delicious!”

Rem regarded her with silence.

“B is for breathtaking~♪ I is for incredible~♪”

It was the biscuit song. And the one who made it up was...

“...What about Shera? Where is she? Is she late?”

Rem grasped the biscuit in her hand tightly.

“...Where... Where are we, Klem?”



“The interstice.”

Their surroundings went black at once. It wasn't a bakery anymore. There were no tables, and the plate of biscuits disappeared.

“...Interstice?”

“Between this world and the next. It is your second time coming here. Do you remember?”

“...Somehow, I do.”

“Back then, Shera brought you back. Normally one cannot return from this place, but... I suppose that's what one could expect from a descendant of the divines.”

Her memory was gradually growing clearer. Not of that time, but of what happened immediately before this.

“...What about Shera?! And Fennely?! What did Gewalt do?!”

“I don't know what happened after you lost consciousness. I have no way of knowing.”

“...Just who are you?”

Klem knitted her brows.

“Hmm. Something along the lines of... residual thoughts? This Demon Lord isn't the real Demon Lord, but a shadow of them that remained inside you as a remnant. Yes, that's about right!”

“...What am I supposed to do?”

“What do you wish to do?”

That question made Rem think. What *did* she want to do?

“...I want... to protect Shera.”

“Truly? In that case, you should have chosen to cast aside the Kobolds from the get-go.”

“...I can't. If I live like that, Shera... and Diablo will hate me. I want to live in a way that would make my comrades proud of me.”

“You’re a greedy one!” Klem laughed.

“...You’re right, I am. I think that wish is far larger than I deserve.”

“Heheheh... That’s good. What is freedom without grand wishes?! And I’ve already given you the power to make that happen!”

“Huh?”

Klem pointed at Rem’s right hand.

†

“...The biscuit?”

The sound of her own voice jolted Rem awake, only for her to be assailed by intense pain from her stomach.

“Gah?! ”

She was in the middle of the forest. Despite it being night, a red glow lit the place. She turned her face. Over the backdrop of the burning forest were figures fighting. It was the Kobold chief Boldboss... and the other warriors, too. Fennely had warned them of the raid, but they chose to stay and fight instead. And their enemies were Gewalt’s summon beasts... The winged venomous serpent, Fafnir, and the fiend of flames, Efreet.

The Therianthropes had already taken a few casualties, and Boldboss was injured. Diablo wasn’t there yet either.

“Kuh... What do I do...?”

And then she remembered. It was likely a dream, but Klem had told her something...

I’ve already given you the power to make that happen!

Rem opened her clenched hand.

What was there wasn’t a biscuit, but a small white fragment.

A tooth.

It was something Klem had given her once before, though it should have been sitting in her pouch. She remembered.

“When you wish to no longer depend on Diablo, but on your own power, press this against your forehead. I imagine its effects may be a bit dire though...”

“You pulled out your tooth—for me?!”

“This Demon Lord enjoys living in this city with you. That’s why I’m giving this to you, to keep you safe.”

Rem pressed the 《Demon Lord’s Fang》 against her forehead. If she truly desired power of her own, there was no better moment than now to wish for it.

Something rang in her ears... But nothing happened.

Was she just teasing me?

The doubt surfaced in Rem. But then suddenly, and radically, the change happened. A shock ran through Rem’s body, as if something had pierced her through the forehead all the way to the back of her head.

“Gaaaah?!”

†

The magical clock in Gewalt’s breast pocket ticked away at the passing seconds. For a summoner, the passage of time was crucial. When was the next time their summon could use its special ability? How quickly was their summon depleting their MP reserves?

By accurately keeping track of time without relying on bodily sensation or intuition, he was able to apply his summons more effectively. Nothing was more shameful for a summoner than getting carried away by their powerful summons’ strength and running out of MP. Gewalt demanded perfection—and nothing less—out of himself.

“Oh bother, my manicure’s getting scuffed.”

He wanted to fix his nails immediately. It was just a small thing, but it was in his nature to be bothered by it.

Mm?

He noticed someone rise to their feet in the corner of his eye. A black Pantherian—the girl, Rem.

“Aaah...”

“My, you’re still alive? But you don’t have any summons left, do you? You can’t do anything.”

“...It doesn’t matter.”

“Huh?”

“You were the one who cut this large hole in my stomach, right?”

Her eyes glittered red and the air around her distorted. Gewalt had once fought high-level grapplers before, so he could tell this was done by making use of SP... but he’d never seen it done in such high concentration before. It felt like he was looking at someone else entirely.

“...Who are you?”

“You already know—I am Rem Galleu. I’ve only just become a bit closer to a Demon Lord now.”

She pried her own lips open with her fingers, revealing fangs that reflected the moonlight. Fangs far too long for a Pantherian.

“A Demon Lord?!”

“You’ve done a lot of awful things, haven’t you? I’d say it’s time you learned a bit of regret.”

Rem kicked the ground, forming an explosion in her wake that scattered dust and sediment in all directions. The next moment, a powerful blow struck Gewalt’s gut, sending him flying back.

What?!

If he wasn’t wearing brand new EX-rank armor, she would have punched right through him and out his back. He rolled across the ground, and upon stopping, raised his head... to find Rem glaring into his eyes. There wasn’t a weapon in her hands.

“Surprisingly tough, aren’t you? I suppose they didn’t make you a palace knight for nothing.”

“U-Ugh... Gaaaaaaaah!”

Gewalt vomited onto the ground. It was humiliating, and his anger flared up with the same intensity as the contents of his stomach.

“Kill her! Fafnir!”

He used the special action he had reserved for cleaning out the Kobolds’ tunnels. The massive serpent blew his poisonous breath, but Rem held out a single hand.

“Shimmering Wave!”

A ball of light burst from her extended palm, dispersing the black, poisonous cloud and crushing Fafnir’s skull, annihilating it! Fafnir was reduced to a black crystal that retreated to Gewalt’s hands.

“M-My Fafnir?!”

“I wasn’t firing at full strength, though...” Rem cocked her head. “Well, Shera’s attack did damage it, and you did shift all the damage you took to it as well. I suppose it makes sense.”

The Kobolds howled and barked, cheering her on. Gewalt clicked his tongue.

“Don’t let it go to your head, you brat! I still have plenty of aces up my sleeve! Efreet, burn her to ash!”

The fiend of flame roared in response.

“Move away, Kobolds!” Rem called out. “Back to your holes! He’s my prey!”

They didn’t understand her words, but awed by the intensity of her voice, the Kobolds stepped away.

Efreet swung its fist at her, and Rem met it with her own fist.

“Yaaaaaaaah!”

Her punch crushed Efreet’s right arm to bits.

“It can’t be!” Gewalt watched what was a veritable nightmare for him unfold

before his eyes. “Th-Those are my top rank summon beasts! A warrior with powerful equipment is one thing, but there’s no way you could match them with just your fists!”

“Is that a fact? I suppose I might not be a grappler, then.”

The words she said earlier flashed in his mind like alarm bells.

“D-Demon Lord?!”

Gewalt wobbled back fearfully. Rem’s lips contorted into a smile. Her right fist lit up, filling with so much concentrated SP that it was visible to the naked eye. The light swirled, forming the shape of a lance.

“《Spiral Lance》.”

Rem rushed forward.

“Hit her with all your strength, Efreet!”

“*Shaaa!*”

Efreet screeched. Its body split in two, lava spilling from within. Rem, who had rushed forward, was washed in it.

A direct hit!

But that moment of joy was soon replaced with utmost despair.

Deflecting even the lava, Rem pierced through Efreet’s torso. The massive amount of SP didn’t just turn her arm into a spear, it enveloped her entire body.

Efreet was reduced to a black crystal, leaving Gewalt without any fighting power remaining. He had other summons, but his strongest two were just one-sidedly crushed. What else would he call?

It seemed Rem’s clothes couldn’t withstand that overwhelming battle, as her outfit crumbled away.

“Such a bother.” Rem knitted her eyebrows. “Though I suppose I don’t lose anything by letting others see me like this... But let’s go with this.”

The SP coating her body turned into a sort of armor.



“What...?!” Gewalt’s eyes opened. “You turned SP into matter?!”

This was no trivial feat, either. She was certainly above level 140. A normal member of the races could never achieve this.

She’s a genius.

And not just that, this was the feat of one with rare talent who had trained themselves to the utmost limit.

Is she actually a Demon Lord?!

She was just a regular summoner until a few moments ago. Gewalt did sense she had a great deal of latent potential, but he never imagined she had this much devilish power hidden away. Rem stuck out her right fist.

“Oh, right. I’d forgotten to pay you back for Shera, too.”

“Aaah...?!”

“It’s Shera we’re talking about, so she’s probably still alive... But for now, I’ll just beat you to high heavens for what you did to her.”

“I-I give in! I surrender! I didn’t even want to do this stupid mission in the boonies anyway! I’ll go back to the capital, I promise!”

“Really now? But if the Therianthropes were to surrender, would you accept it?”

“Of course I would!”

“Lying bastard.”

Her fist—not the one with the Spiral Lance, but her left one—sank into Gewalt’s face.

“Gaaah?!”

He took to the air as if it was some kind of joke, flying back until his back slammed against a tree. His mind was muddled.

I-I’m gonna die. I have to run away....

His consciousness was all the more weakened because of all the MP he

wasted. Even getting up was difficult.

“Ugh... Trap Worm...”

The summon beast gulped up Gewalt, along with the ground beneath him, before burrowing underground. He sank into the darkness.

N-No... If I go unconscious now, the summon will disappear inside the ground...

Gewalt struggled to maintain consciousness as it threatened to slip away like water held in his hands.

Final Chapter: Speaking to Rem

The forest was dark. Diablo had defeated Solami and taken off after Rem, but...

Crap, I can't see anything!

Elves, Pantherians, and Dwarves had good night vision, but Demons didn't have that kind of sensory advantage. Hurrying would just make him run into the trees. Thinking of a more effective way to go about it, he lifted himself above the trees with flight magic.

With the moonlight on his side, Diablo was somehow able to survey the sea of trees. But from this position, he wouldn't be able to see any of the markings on those trees, and consequently, wouldn't be able to find the village. But just as he was at a loss over what to do, a pillar of fire flared up in the distance.

The enemy's spell?!

He flew off at max speed. Still, it wasn't all that much faster than walking on foot, and it took him the lesser part of an hour to arrive. By then the fighting had ended, and the forest was burning.

“《Weather Rain》!” Diablo waved a hand, conjuring up a magical shower of water.

Perhaps owing to the rainy climate, the clouds formed swiftly, moistening the ground. The flames burning the forest gradually shrank.

There was a figure standing in the rain. Her outfit was somewhat odd, but it was...

“Rem!”

Diablo called her name, to which she turned around.

“Oh, you... You came at just the right time.”

“I did? The fighting's already over from the looks of things. I only put out the fire.”

“...Yes, leaving it be would be disastrous.” Rem nodded.

“The way you look... What happened?”

Her appearance was similar to something he’d seen before. It was close to how she looked when the Demon Overlord Modinaram possessed her.

“...If I told you I had a change of heart, would you laugh?”

“Don’t tell me another Demon Lord took over your body.”

Rem’s expression turned quizzical.

“...That’s not quite right, but isn’t exactly wrong, either. But this time, there’s no Demon Lord in my body. This is the influence of my own emotional state.”

“What emotional state?”

“An unfortunate one.”

“Mm.”

Rem’s eyes glinted red.

“...I wish to kill you... And then myself.”

She thrust her right hand forward, pressing the palm of her hand against Diablo’s left breast. It was just about the spot where Solami had ran him through earlier, and his clothes were torn. Rem’s hand touched his skin directly, and through that, Diablo could feel her Glow.

It was a seething heat. An intense storm. And he could feel, indeed, a sorrow, strong enough to spill into his own emotions.

She was crying.

Rem was weeping, all alone in a dark room...

Such an image surfaced in Diablo’s mind. And he realized he’d betrayed her. A person that hurt another had no way of seeing just how much the other side was hurt. Diablo surely knew that deep down, and yet...

The Glow emanating from Rem was too powerful. With Diablo being as defenseless as he was, even a single blow would be a fatal one. But she didn’t perform a single technique.

Why isn't she doing anything...?

Someone had embraced Rem from behind.

Shera.

"Don't. You can't do that, Rem."

She had hugged Rem from behind, shivering. Her voice was shaking, too. Diablo could tell at once that Shera was injured, too. Her clothes were violently torn and dripping with blood.

"...I know," Rem whispered. "I haven't lost that much of my reasoning."

"Really?"

"...Who knows? If you hadn't interrupted me, I might have run through him just now."

Tears trailed from Shera's eyes and down her cheeks. Those transparent pearls fell on Rem's black hair.

"You can't hurt Diablo."

"...Even if you'll never forgive me for it, I can live with that."

"No. If you do that, you'll cry, too."

"...I swear, you're always so..."

"We'd all be sad."

"...Yes. I won't be able to forgive myself either. That's why I'll use my own two hands to..."

Shera gulped.

"That's messed up! You'd never say that, Rem! There really is something wrong about you now, Rem!"

"...Maybe there is."

"Come to your senses, Rem."

"Fuuu..."

Rem took a deep breath. And then a bursting *bang!* sound echoed out. Shera

was sent flying and landed on her butt on the ground.

“Ouch!”

She shook Shera off?!

Rem’s eyes were moist. She cried, filled with quiet anger all the while.

“...That’s too selfish. Telling me to go back to the way I was...? Back to how I always just put up with everything?!”

Diablo clenched his teeth and breathed out. This was where his true battle was. A battle where no magic, no matter how powerful it could ever be, would be of any use to him.

“Rem. I really did weigh on your tolerance, didn’t I?”

“...Now you notice?”

“I’m sorry.”

“...You’re not the one at fault here. It’s all my emotions.”

That’s wrong. I’m happy you felt for me.

He was still racked with doubt, still anxious as to whether he was worthy of those feelings. He couldn’t even define how he himself was feeling.

But Rem’s despair was due to his failing.

“Hey... It might be... a bit too late for this...”

Rem regarded him with silence. But no matter how bad the situation was, it was no reason to give up. Diablo took a ring out of his pouch. “No, it really is... far too late.”

Rem’s eyes widened.

“...What’s that?”

“I actually had it made in Faltra. I don’t know where everything went wrong...”

He went to the capital because of the coupon for the monster girl soapland... Maybe that was the first big mistake, but he decided to forget about that for now. This was a serious discussion, and not the time to recall that.

Rem's hand was shaking. He could feel it against his skin.

"...You had it made... for me...?"

"Yes."

"...Can I really... really believe in you this time?"

She gazed at him with serious eyes. At a moment like this, there was no place for Demon Lord role play. He had to say it with his own words. Diablo steeled his resolve and parted his lips to speak, but...

"Aaah..."

He couldn't. Rem was waiting for his words, as did Shera, who was sitting on the ground. And so he switched to a Demon Lord's words.

"Believe me or not—that is your choice to make!"

Rem was silent.

"If you believe in this Demon Lord, accept it. And if you cannot, use your right hand to strike my heart out."

Rem had thanked him for saving her countless times. But he'd hurt or angered her just as much. Shera gulped audibly. And Rem eventually... Extended her left hand.

"...I choose to believe you, Diablo."

Shera heaved a relieved sigh. Diablo did the same inside.

"Hmph... Believing in a Demon Lord. You are a curious one."

Putting on airs with his usual tone, Diablo slipped the ring—the real wedding ring this time—onto Rem's left ring finger. Large tears slid down Rem's cheeks. The red glint in her eyes was gone. What enveloped her body—the materialized Glow—crumbled away.

"...Diablo."

She'd likely exhausted all her strength. Rem's consciousness slipped away, leading to sudden slumber.

"Ah, hey, Rem!"

“Rem!”

Diablo and Shera hurriedly caught Rem as she passed out, naked.

†

“Saved us. Give thanks,” the Kobolds’ chief, Boldboss, said.

“No... We should be thanking you.”

They prepared clothes and a bed for Rem. They were in the village’s tunnels, where the Kobolds were hurriedly making preparations to move out. Eyeing them as they did, Diablo heaved a sigh.

“I couldn’t hold up my side of the promise.”

They’d stopped this attack, but the Humans’ objective was the silver mine. They’d send another army sooner or later.

“We not know our place.” Boldboss shook his head. *“Seeing that battle made us happy we still alive.”*

“She must have been very strong.”

“Me fight with fists, too. Can tell just how high, far away her abilities.”

“Mmm.”

Apparently, after going berserk, Rem beat a Fafnir and Efreet summon with nothing but her bare hands. Her firepower must have been absurd. She even turned her SP into armor... It was probably something along the lines of the martial art 《Psycho Armor》. There was no doubt she was a grappler of over level 140.

Why did she level up so suddenly?

Rem should have been a level 60 summoner. She also apprenticed under the swordmaster on the side, but hadn’t reached level 80 as a warrior yet. Diablo doubted she had simply hidden her true strength.

He decided to ask Rem once she woke up. If she was even stronger than Solami, Diablo might not be able to beat her.

That... was dangerous, Diablo pondered as he broke into a cold sweat.

Fennely hopped down from somewhere.

“Diablo!”

“Mm?”

“Me... made this. Take this... if want.”

She handed him a silver decoration that shined with a bright sheen.

“Mythril silver?!” Diablo’s eyes widened.

“Hii?! Wh-What? It weird?!”

“No, it’s fine. All right. I’ll take it.”

“Yay!” Fennely hopped happily, and then skipped off, disappearing down the tunnels.

Diablo eyed the ornament silently. Mythril silver. *So one can mine highly pure mythril silver from this mountain.* It was an absolutely necessary resource for crafting high-level weapons laced with magic. Depending on just how big the deposit here was, it made sense that the king of Lyferia sent a palace knight to secure this mine.

Boldboss’s lips turned to a frown.

“We decide to move deeper into mountain. Hide better next time. Will probably never meet again.”

“I see. That’s good.”

Diablo would return to the races’ country, but the Kobolds would hide from the mortal races. The one thing that kept Diablo and the Kobolds connected was gone.

“Farewell, our savior. Clan not forget what you have all done for us, Diablo.”

“Yes... Erm... Take care.”

Diablo wasn’t good with emotional goodbyes.

†

Parting with Boldboss, Diablo returned to the room they were given.

“How is she?”

“Oh, Diablo.”

Shera raised her head.

“You must be tired too.”

“I’m fine! Rem did most of the fighting... And your potion healed my wounds.”

“Don’t force yourself.”

Diablo sat next to Shera, who was sitting next to Rem’s sleeping form.

She’s out like a light.

He had used a potion on her to be certain, and her breathing and temperature seemed to be fine. He was no doctor and couldn’t tell much more, but it looked like she was just asleep from exhaustion.

“But are you all right, Diablo?” Shera peered at him.

“Mm? I didn’t use much MP.”

In the end, he only fought Solami this time. The girls handled Gewalt.

“You look kinda sad.”

“Well... Ah, no... I am a Demon Lord. Antagonizing a king of the races wouldn’t discourage me.” He said this grandly, but it was a grave matter in reality. What they did was outright treason.

Greenwood might go to war with Lyferia...

“I don’t really get it! But no matter what, it’s much better than the forest burning down!” Shera said cheerfully.

Even with the situation being as grim as it was, Shera remained endlessly perky. Diablo wished he could learn from her optimism.

Yeah, I don’t regret what we did today.

“When Rem gets better, we should head back to the capital. Leaving Horn and Sylvie there might be dangerous.”

“Really?”

“Probably.”

Diablo didn't know this country's laws too well, but they were considered accomplices of traitors. At worst, they could be executed.

"So we go back with Horn and Sylvie to Faltra?"

"Yeah, and after that..."

They take Klem and run off to Greenwood? But that presented a major problem: there were no biscuits in Greenwood.

I'll think about the rest of the details later. First, we go to the capital. Getting in might be a problem...

"But worry not, Shera. Leave everything to me, for I am a Demon Lord."

"Maybe we can ask Lumachina."

"Mm?"

"And Alicia's in the capital, too."

"Her..."

The situation being what it was, they might have to rely on all the connections they had. Diablo was still anxious, but their policy for the time being was decided. Once Rem woke up, they would consult her to iron out the details.

Being underground messed with his perception of time, but it should have been approaching dawn. He'd spent the whole night awake, and felt fatigue creep over him.

"Shera, shall we take turns sleeping?"

She seemed to sink into thought, and then brought her face closer to his. He'd gotten used to seeing her, but having her all-too-beautiful face so close to his still made a blush creep over his cheeks. That's one habit he'd likely never get over.

"Erm, Diablo..."

"Wh-What?"

"I, uhm. I saw it."

"Huh?"

Shera blushed.

“I saw what you... did in the courtyard with Solami... last night.”

To be continued...



Afterword

This series' anime adaptation began airing in July of 2018! Thank you all so much for all the popularity and support you've shown toward the series. A huge thank you to the director, Murano, and all the others involved in its production.

The anime is so wonderful, I have no more regrets... That's how happy I feel, and I'll work hard to make sure I get another chance like this. Thank you for all your support going forward!

Now then, volume 11. Diablo finally came face to face with the king of Lyferia. He even blew a hole in the castle, claiming himself to be a Demon Lord. He visited new lands, and had meetings and farewells with all sorts of people.

The plot this time was centered around Rem. I hope you enjoyed it. I'd actually discussed the story for this volume with the illustrator, Takahiro Tsurusaki, since before volume 1 came out. I'd planned to include it since around volume 8, but... It was too long to include in one volume, and with the Demon Overlord battle coming up, I couldn't afford to let the plot dawdle for so long, so it ended up like this. I'm glad I got to write it, though.

Time for some thanks, then.

To Takahiro Tsurusaki. Your illustrations for the anime's ending song and the box illustration were as lovely as ever!

To Ooishi, the designer from Afterglow, thank you for your help, including the map this time.

To the editor in charge of me, Shouji, it feels like I'll always be saying "I'll make it next time!" but I ended up just cutting it close with the schedule this time... I'll make it next time!

To everyone in Kodansha's editorial department and everyone else involved, and to all you readers who picked up this book, I offer a thank you of the highest caliber! Thank you very much!

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How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 11

by Yukiya Murasaki

Translated by ZackZeal Edited by Jack Diaz

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